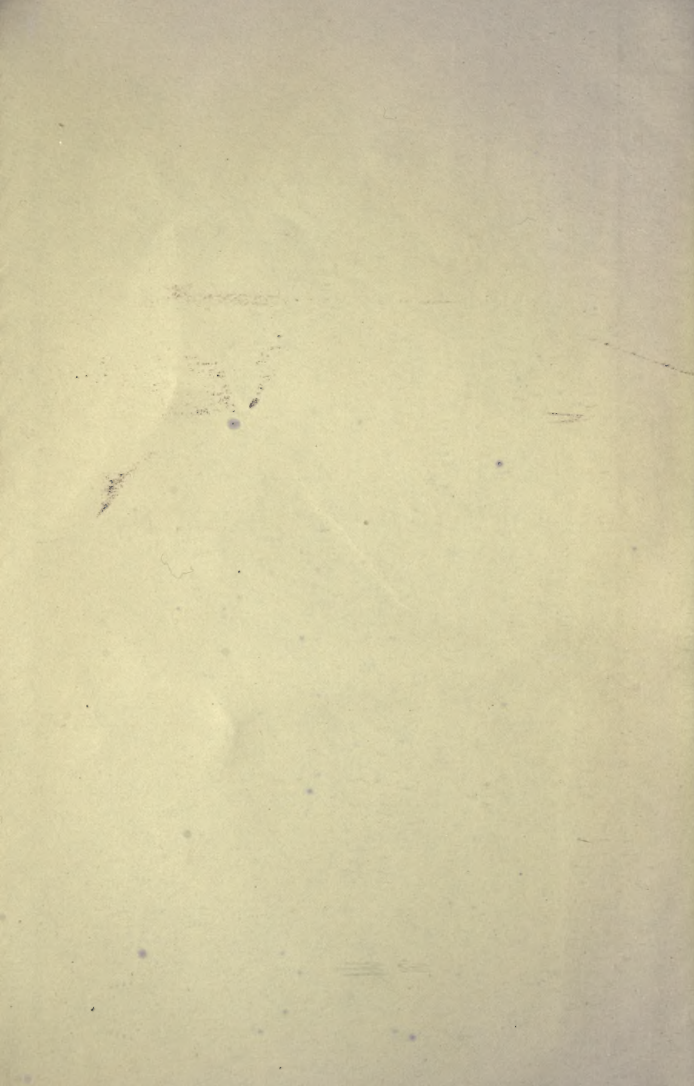


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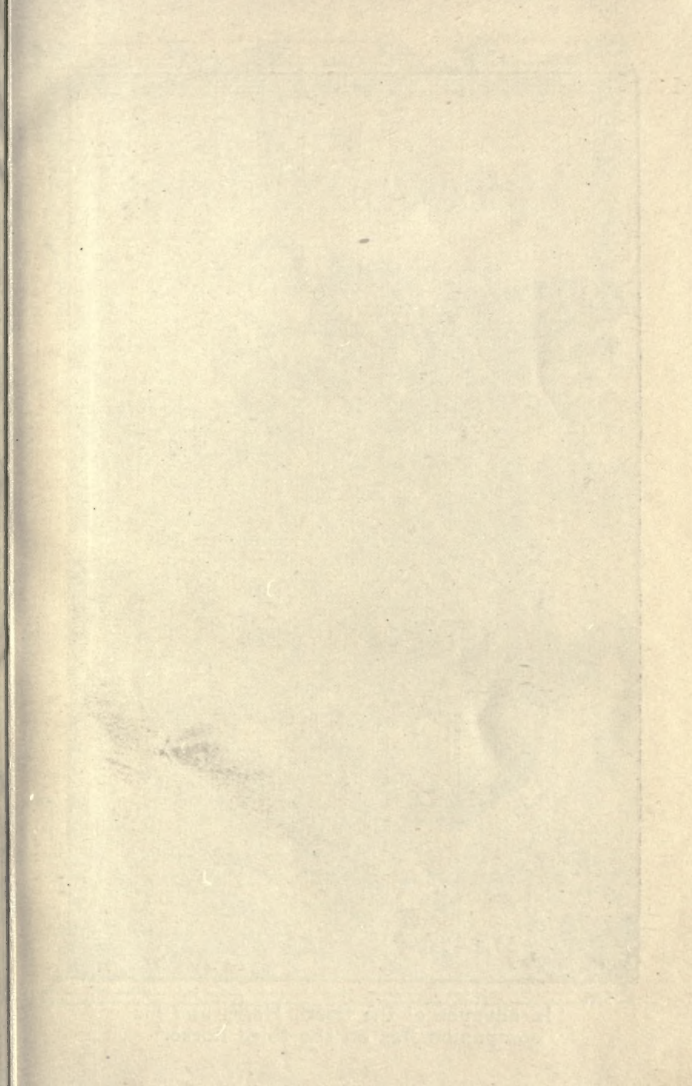


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THE FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN

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'In advance of the flood, Henri and his companion fled on the third horse.'

THE FORTY-FIVE GUARDSMEN

ALEXANDER DUMAS

ILLUSTRATED BY PAUL HARDY



LONDON & GLASGOW
COLLINS' CLEAR-TYPE PRESS

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CHAPTER I

THE GATE OF SAINT ANTOINE

Etiam si omnes !

ON the 26th of October, in the year 1585, the barriers of the gate of Saint Antoine were still closed, contrary to the usual custom, at half-past ten in the morning.

At a quarter to eleven, a guard of twenty Swiss, who, by their uniform, were recognised to be Swiss from the small cantons, that is to say, the best friends of Henry the Third, then reigning, debouched from the street de la Mortellerie, and advanced towards the gate of Saint Antoine, which opened, and closed behind them. Once outside this gate, they ranged themselves along the hedges, which, outside the barrier, bordered the scattered enclosures on each side of the road, and, by their appearance alone, drove back a good number of peasants and small bourgeois, coming from Montreuil, Vincennes, or Saint Maur, to enter the city before noon, an operation they were not enabled to effect, the gate, as we have observed, being found closed.

If it is true that a crowd naturally brings disorder in its train, we might suppose that, by sending this guard, Monsieur the Provost intended to prevent the disorder which might take place at the gate of Saint Antoine.

In fact, the assemblage was considerable; it arrived by three converging roads, and, at every moment, friars from the convents of the suburbs, women seated in the panniers of their donkeys, peasants in their carts, increased this already compact mass, which the unusual closing of the gates arrested at the barriers, and all, by their questions, more or less hurried, produced a species of low continued murmur; whilst, at times, some voices, issuing from the general diapason, ascended even to the octave of menace or complaint.

We might also remark, besides this mass of arrivals who were desirous of entering the town, some peculiar groups.

who seemed to have issued from it. These, instead of looking towards the town, through the interstices of the barriers, scanned the horizon, bounded by the convent of the Jacobins, the priory of Vincennes, and the cross Faubin, as if, by one of these three routes, forming a sort of fan, some Messiah was expected to appear to them.

The latter groups did not ill resemble the tranquil islands which rise in the middle of the Seine, whilst around them, the water whirling and playing, detaches either a morsel of turf or some twigs of the willow, which, after hesitating some time on the eddies, at length determine to float with the stream.

These groups, to whom we return at some length, because they merit all our attention, were composed, for the most part, of the bourgeois of Paris, warmly wrapped up, for we have forgotten to state, the weather was cold, the breeze cutting, and heavy clouds, rolling near the earth, seemed determined to wrest from the trees the last yellow leaves which still mournfully trembled on the branches.

Three of those bourgeois conversed together, or rather, two were conversing, and the third listening. Let us better express our meaning, and say, the third did not even appear to listen, so deep was the attention with which he looked towards Vincennes.

Let us first occupy ourselves with the latter.

He was a man of some height when erect; but, at this moment, his long legs were bent under him, whilst his arms, not less long in proportion, were crossed over his doublet. Leaning against the hedge, agreeably supported by the elastic bushes, and with the obstinacy of a man who is desirous of not being recognised, he kept his face concealed by his large hand, risking merely an eye, whose piercing glance darted between the middle and ring finger, separated to the distance strictly necessary for the passage of the visual ray.

By the side of this singular personage, a little man, perched on a hillock, was talking with a fat man, who was endeavouring to steady himself in the declivity of the same hillock, and, upon every slip, grasped the buttons of the doublet of his interlocutor.

These were the two other bourgeois, forming, with the person seated, the cabalistic number of three, whom we have mentioned in a preceding paragraph.

'Yes, Maitre Miton,' said the little man to the fat one, 'yes, I say, and I repeat, that there will be a hundred thousand round the scaffold of Salcède, a hundred thousand at least. See, without reckoning those who are already at the place de Grève, or arriving there by the different quarters of Paris, see the multitude here, and this is only one gate. Judge, then, since by counting rightly we shall find sixteen gates.'

'A hundred thousand! 'tis a good many, neighbour Friard,' replied the fat man; 'many, believe me, will follow my example, and will not go to see this wretched Salcède quartered, from the fear of a tumult, and they will be right.'

'Maitre Miton, Maitre Miton, take care,' replied the little man; 'you are speaking like a politician. There will be nothing, absolutely nothing, I'll answer for it.'

And seeing that his interrogator shook his head in a doubtful manner,—

'Is it not so, sir?' he continued, turning towards the man with the long legs and arms, who, instead of continuing his gaze towards Vincennes, had, without removing his hands from before his face, changed his point of view, and chosen the barrier upon which to fix his attention.

'Sir?' demanded the latter, as if he had only heard the question addressed to him, and not the words preceding this interpolation, which had been addressed to the second bourgeois,

'I say, there will be nothing at the Grève to-day.'

'I think that you are mistaken, and that there will be the quartering of Salcède,' tranquilly replied the man with the long legs and arms.

'Yes, no doubt; but I say there will be no noise in consequence of this quartering.'

'There will be the noise of the lashes bestowed upon the horses.'

'You misunderstand me; by noise I mean tumult, and I say there will be no tumult at the Grève. If a tumult were expected, the King would not have had a box, at the Hotel de Ville, decorated, to be present at the execution, with the two Queens and a portion of the court.'

'Do kings always know when a tumult is to take place?' said the tall man, shrugging his shoulders, with an air of sovereign pity.

'Oh, oh !' said Maitre Miton, stooping to the ear of his companion; 'the man speaks in a queer fashion. Do you know him, neighbour ?'

'No,' replied the little man.

'Well, why do you speak to him then ?'

'I speak to him, to speak to him.'

'And you are wrong; you see plainly he is not a natural talker.'

'It seems to me, however,' replied neighbour Friard, loud enough to be heard by the man alluded to, 'that one of the greatest blessings of life is to exchange thoughts.'

'With those we know well,' replied Maitre Miton, 'but not with those of whom we know nothing.'

'Are not all men brothers, as the curate of Saint Leu says ?' added gossip Friard, in a persuasive tone.

'Which means, that they were so primitively; but in times like ours, the relationship has strangely relaxed,' friend Friard. 'Converse with me, then, if you are decided upon conversing, and leave this stranger alone.'

'Yes, but I have known you a long while, as you say, and I know beforehand what you will reply to me; whilst, on the contrary, perhaps this stranger may have something new to tell me.'

'Chut ! he is listening to you.'

'So much the better; if he hears me, perhaps he will reply. You think then, sir,' continued Friard, turning towards the stranger, 'that there will be no tumult at the Grève ?'

'I ? I never said anything of the sort.'

'I do not pretend that you said so,' continued Friard, in a tone he endeavoured to render fine; 'I pretend that you thought so, that's all.'

'And upon what do you ground this certitude ? are you a sorcerer, Monsieur Friard ?'

'Why, he knows me !' exclaimed the bourgeois in astonishment; 'how does he know me ?'

'Have I not named you two or three times, gossip ?' said Miton, shrugging his shoulders, like a man ashamed, before a stranger, of the slight intelligence of his friend.

'Ah ! it's true,' said Friard, making an effort to comprehend, and thanks to this effort succeeding; 'on my word, it's true. Well, as he knows me he will reply. Well, sir,' he continued, turning towards the stranger, 'I think that you think that there will be an uproar at the Grève.'

seeing that if you did not think so, you would be there, whereas, on the contrary, you are here. Ha !'

This 'Ha !' proved that neighbour Friard had attained, in his deduction, the furthest limits of his logic and his imagination.

'But, Monsieur Friard, since you think the contrary of what you think I think,' replied the stranger, dwelling on the words already pronounced by his questioner, and repeated by himself, 'why are you not at the Grève ? It appears to me, however, that the spectacle is cheering enough for the friends of the King to crowd there. After this, perhaps, you will reply to me that you are not one of the friends of the King, but of those of Monsieur de Guise; and that you are waiting here for the Lorraines, who, they say, are to make an invasion of Paris, to deliver M. de Salcède.'

'No, sir,' replied the little man, visibly terrified at what the stranger supposed; 'no, sir, I am waiting for my wife Ma'amselle Nicole Friard, who is gone with some twenty-four table-cloths to the priory of the Jacobins, having the honour of being the laundress of Dom Modeste Gorenflot, abbé of the said priory of Jacobins. But, to return to the uproar of which my friend Miton was speaking, and in which I do not believe, nor you either, by what you say at least——'

'Neighbour, neighbour,' exclaimed Miton, 'look what is taking place.'

Maitre Friard followed the direction indicated by the finger of his companion, and saw that besides the barriers, the closing of which had already so preoccupied their minds, they also closed the gate.

The gate being shut, a party of the Swiss took their station in front of the house.

'How ! how !' exclaimed Friard, turning pale; 'the barrier is not sufficient, and they are now shutting the gate !'

'Well ! what did I tell you ?' replied Miton, also turning pale.

'It's droll, is it not ?' said the stranger, laughing.

At sight of this fresh precaution, a long murmur of surprise, and some cries of terror, ascended from the assembled mass which encumbered the approaches to the barrier.

'Make a circle,' cried the imperative voice of an officer.

The manœuvre was accomplished at the same moment, but not without some difficulty; the men on horseback and the men in the carts, compelled to retreat, crushed here and there some feet, and broke the ribs, right and left, of some amongst the crowd.

The women screamed, the men swore, those who could fly, fled, tumbling one over another.

'The Lorraines! the Lorraines!' cried a voice in the midst of this tumult.

The most terrible cry borrowed from the pallid vocabulary of fright would not have produced an effect more prompt and decisive than this one.

'The Lorraines!!'

'Well! do you hear? do you see?' exclaimed the trembling Miton, 'the Lorraines, the Lorraines, let us fly!'

'Fly! and where to?' demanded Friard.

'Into this enclosure,' said Miton, wounding his hands in seizing the thorns of the hedge on which was comfortably seated the stranger.

'In this enclosure,' repeated Friard, 'that is easier said than done, Maitre Miton. I see no gap by which we can enter the enclosure, and you cannot leap the hedge, which is higher than I am.'

'I shall attempt it,' said Miton, 'I shall attempt it;' and he made fresh efforts.

'Ah! take care then, my good woman,' cried Friard in the distressed tone of a man who begins to lose his senses; 'your ass is treading on my heels. Ouf! sir cavalier, just pay a little attention, your horse is going to kick. Tudieu! carter, my friend, you will run the shaft of your cart through my ribs!'

Whilst Maitre Miton clung to the branches of the hedge to get over, and neighbour Friard searched in vain for an opening to creep through, the stranger had risen, and simply opened the compass of his long legs, and by a very ordinary movement, like that of a cavalier when he mounts his horse, crossed his legs over the hedge without a single branch touching his small clothes.

Maitre Miton followed his example, but tore his in three places; but it was not thus with Friard, who, being unable to pass over or under, and, moreover, threatened to be crushed by the mob, uttered the most painful cries; when the stranger extended his long arm, seized him by

the collar of his doublet, and raising him, transported him to the other side of the hedge, with the same facility he would have lifted a child.

'Oh! oh! oh!' exclaimed Maitre Miton, delighted at the spectacle, and following with his eyes the ascent and descent of his friend Maitre Friard, 'you look like the sign of the grand Absalom.'

'Ouf!' exclaimed Friard, on touching the ground, 'let me look like whatever you will, here I am the other side of the hedge, and thanks to Monsieur——' and drawing himself up to observe the stranger to whose breast he scarcely reached—'Ah! sir,' he continued, 'what deeds of grace, sir! you are a veritable Hercules, word of honour, faith of Jean Friard; your name, sir,—the name of my saviour, the name of my friend?'

And the brave man indeed pronounced the last word with an effusion of the heart deeply grateful.

'My name is Briquet, sir,' replied the stranger, 'Robert Briquet, at your service.'

'And you have already rendered me a considerable service, Monsieur Robert Briquet, I am bold to say; oh! my wife will bless you; but, à propos, my poor wife, oh! mon Dieu! mon Dieu! she will be stifled in this crowd. Ah, cursed Swiss! who are only good to crush the people.'

Neighbour Friard had scarcely finished this apostrophe when he felt on his shoulder the weight of a hand as heavy as a block of stone.

He turned round to see who was audacious enough to take this liberty with him.

The hand was that of a Swiss.

'Should you like to be knocked down, my leetle friend?' said the robust soldier.

'We are bagged,' exclaimed Friard.

'The devil take the hindmost!' added Miton.

And the pair, thanks to the friendly hedge, having room before them, took to their heels, followed by the ironical smiles, and silent regard, of the man with the long arms; who, having lost sight of them, approached the Swiss, who was placed there as a vidette.

'Thy hand is firm, companion, as it appears?'

'Why, faith! sir, not pad, not pad.'

'So much the better, for 'tis an important matter, especially if the Lorraines should come, as they say.'

'Dey vill not come.'

'No?'

'No, not at all.'

'Why do they close this gate then? I do not understand it.'

'You no vant to understand,' replied the Swiss, laughing aloud at his jest.

'Tis right, my comrade, very right,' said Robert Briquet; 'thank you.'

And Robert Briquet left the Swiss to join another group, whilst the worthy Helvetian, ceasing his laugh, murmured,—

'By Gott! *Ich glaube er spottet meiner. Was ist das viir ein mann, der sich erlanlet ein Schweitzer seiner konigliche majestaet auszulachen?*'

Which, translated into English, means :—

'By the Lord! I think he laughs at me. Who is this man, then, who dares to laugh at a Swiss of His Majesty?'

One of the groups was composed of a considerable number of citizens, taken by surprise, outside the town, by this unexpected closing of the gates. These citizens surrounded four or five cavaliers of a very martial appearance, whom the closing of the barriers greatly annoyed, as it seemed, for they cried with all their strength :—

'The gate! the gate!'

These cries, repeated by all the spectators with additional energy, occasioned at this moment the confusion of Babel.

Robert Briquet advanced towards the group, and commenced shouting louder than any one who had preceded him :—

'The gate! the gate!'

The result of this was, that one of the cavaliers, delighted at this vocal power, turned round, bowed to him, and said :—

'Is it not disgraceful, sir, that they should close the gate of the city in full day, as though the Spaniards or English besieged Paris?'

CHAPTER II

WHAT TOOK PLACE OUTSIDE THE GATE OF
SAINT ANTOINE

ROBERT BRIQUET regarded with attention the person who had addressed him; he was a man between forty and forty-five years of age.

This man also appeared to be the chief of three or four other cavaliers who surrounded him.

The examination, no doubt, gave confidence to Robert Briquet, for he directly returned the salute, and replied :—

‘Ah ! sir, you are right, ten times right, twenty times right; but,’ he added, ‘without being too curious, may I ask what motive you suspect for this measure ?’

‘Pardieu !’ said a spectator, ‘from the fear that they will not be able to devour their Salcède !’

‘Cap de Bious !’ said a voice, ‘a sad mouthful.’

Robert Briquet turned round from whence came this voice, whose accent indicated a stout Gascon, and he perceived a young man of twenty or twenty-five, who was resting his hand on the croup of the horse of the one who appeared to be the leader.

The young man was bareheaded, no doubt having lost his cap in the *mêlée*.

Maitre Briquet seemed an observer; but in general his observations were short, for he quickly turned his attention from the Gascon, whom he probably thought of little importance, to fix it on the cavalier.

‘But,’ said the latter, ‘since they announce that this Salcède belongs to M. de Guise, it is not so very bad a dish !’

‘Bah ! they say that ?’ inquired the curious Gascon, opening his large eyes.

‘Yes, undoubtedly, they say that,’ replied the cavalier, shrugging his shoulders; ‘but in these times they say many idle stories.’

‘Ah ! then you think, sir,’ hazarded Briquet, with his inquisitive eye and crafty smile, ‘that Salcède does not belong to M. de Guise ?’

‘I not only believe so, but I am sure of it,’ replied the cavalier. And, seeing that Robert Briquet, getting

closer to him, made a movement which meant, 'Ah! ah!—and upon what do you ground this certitude?' he continued,—

'Undoubtedly, if Salcède belonged to the *Duke*, the duke would not have allowed him to be taken; or at least would not have allowed him to be brought in this manner from Brussels to Paris, bound hand and foot, without, at any rate, making an attempt at a rescue.'

'Attempt a rescue,' said Briquet, 'that would be rather bold; for, in fact, whether it succeeded, or whether it failed, the moment it arrived on the part of M. de Guise, M. de Guise would avow that he had conspired against the Duke of Anjou.'

'M. de Guise,' dryly replied the cavalier, 'would not have been restrained by this consideration, I am sure; and from the moment when he neither reclaimed or defended Salcède, Salcède did not belong to him.'

'And yet, excuse me if I insist,' continued Briquet; 'but it is not I who invent; it appears certain that Salcède has spoken.'

'Where?'

'Before the judges.'

'No, not before the judges, sir; at the torture.'

'Is it not the same thing then?' demanded Maitre Briquet, in a manner which he vainly endeavoured to render innocent.

'No, certainly, it is not the same; besides, they pretend that he has spoken, be it so; but they do not repeat what he has said.'

'You will excuse me again, sir,' said Robert Briquet; 'they do repeat it, and very lengthily too.'

'And what has he said? let us hear,' said the cavalier impatiently; 'speak, you who are so well instructed.'

'I do not boast of being well informed, sir, since I seek for information from you, on the contrary,' said Briquet.

'Come, let us understand each other,' said the cavalier, still impatiently, 'you pretend that they repeat the words of Salcède; what were these words? tell us.'

'I cannot say that they were his own words, sir,' said Robert Briquet, who seemed to take a pleasure in irritating the cavalier.

'But what are those they give him?'

'They pretend that he has confessed that he conspired for M. de Guise.'

'Against the King of France, no doubt; always the same song.'

'Not against His Majesty the King of France, but against His Highness Monseigneur the Duke d'Anjou.'

'If he has confessed that——'

'Well!' demanded Robert Briquet.

'Well! he is a wretch,' said the cavalier, knitting his brow.

'Yes,' said Robert Briquet softly; 'but if he has done that which he has confessed, he is a brave man. Ah! sir, the boots, the rack, and the boiling pots, will make honest people say many things.'

'Alas! you speak a great truth there, sir,' said the cavalier, softening a little, and uttering a sigh.

'Bah!' interrupted the Gascon, who by bending his head towards each of the speakers had heard the whole, 'bah! boots, rack, fine trifles these; if Salcède has spoken, he is a knave, and his patron another.'

'Oh! oh!' muttered the cavalier, who could not repress a movement of impatience, 'you sing very high, Monsieur le Gascon.'

'I?'

'Yes, you.'

'I sing what tune I like, Cap de Bious! So much the worse for those who do not like my song.'

The cavalier started as if in anger.

'Peace!' said a mild voice, although imperative, the owner of which Robert Briquet in vain endeavoured to discover.

The cavalier seemed to make an effort to obey; he had not however the power of entirely restraining himself.

'And do you know well those of whom you are speaking, sir?' he inquired of the Gascon.

'Do I know Salcède?'

'Yes.'

'Not the least in the world.'

'And the Duke de Guise?'

'Not a whit the more.'

'And the Duke d'Alençon?'

'Still less.'

'Do you know that M. Salcède is a brave fellow?'

'So much the better; in that case he will die bravely.'

'And that M. de Guise, when he means to conspire, will do so by himself?'

'Cap de Bious ! what's that to me ?'

'And that M. the Duke d'Anjou, formerly M. d'Alençon, had killed, or allowed to be killed, whoever interested himself about him—La Mole, Coconas, Bussy, and the rest ?'

'I laugh at it.'

'How ! you laugh at it ?'

'Mayneville ! Mayneville !' murmured the same voice.

'Undoubtedly I laugh at it. I am but a thing, sang-dieu ! I have business at Paris this very morning, and on account of this madman Salcède they shut the gates in my face ! Cap de Bious ! this Salcède is a scoundrel, and also those who, with him, are the cause of the gates being closed instead of being opened.'

'Oh ! oh ! here is a rough Gascon,' murmured Robert Briquet, 'and no doubt we shall see something curious.'

But this something curious which the bourgeois expected did not happen. The cavalier, to whose face this last apostrophe had caused the blood to rush, lowered his tone, was silent, and swallowed his anger.

'You are right,' said he; 'woe to those who hinder us from entering Paris.'

'Oh ! oh !' said Robert Briquet to himself, who had lost neither the clouds on the features of the cavalier, nor the two appeals which had been made to his patience; 'ah ! ah ! it seems I shall see something more curious still than what I expected.'

As he made this reflection, the sound of a trumpet was heard, and almost immediately the Swiss, breaking through the crowd with their halberds, as though they were dividing a gigantic pasty of larks, separated the groups into two compact masses, who lined each side of the road, leaving the middle empty.

In this middle space, the officer of whom we have spoken, and to whose guardianship the gate seemed confided, passed on his horse backwards and forwards; and, after a moment's examination, which looked like a defiance, he ordered the trumpets to sound.

This was executed at the same moment, and caused a silence to reign in the masses, which we might have supposed impossible, after so much agitation and tumult.

And now the crier, with his fleur-de-lis'd tunic, wearing on his breast the escutcheon of the arms of the city of Paris; advanced with a paper in his hand, and read, with the nasal tone peculiar to this species :—

'Let it be known to our good people of Paris, and the neighbourhood, that the gates are closed, from this time until one o'clock afternoon, and that no one can enter into the city before that hour, and this by the will of the King, and the vigilance of M. the Provost of Paris.'

The crier stopped to take breath. The crowd profited by this pause to show its surprise and discontent, by a loud shout, which the crier, we must do him this justice, sustained without flinching.

The officer made a sign with his hand, and silence was re-established.

The crier continued without trouble and without hesitation, as though habit had steeled him against these manifestations, to one of which he had just been exposed:—

'There shall be excepted from this measure those who may present themselves bearers of a sign of recognition, or who may be well and duly called by letters and mandates.

'Given at the hotel of the Provost of Paris, on the express order of His Majesty, the 26th day of October, in the year of Grace 1585.

'Trumpets, sound.'

The trumpets immediately gave forth their spirited notes.

The crier had scarcely ceased speaking, when, behind the hedge of Swiss and soldiers, the crowd began to undulate, like a serpent whose rings swell and writhe.

'What does this mean?' asked the most peaceable of each other. 'No doubt some fresh complot!'

'Oh! oh! 'Tis to prevent our entering Paris, it seems that the affair has been thus arranged,' said, speaking in a low tone to his companions, the cavalier who had supported with so strange a patience the rebuffs of the Gascon; 'these Swiss, this crier, these bolts, these troops are for us; upon my soul, I am proud of it.'

'Place! place! you others,' cried the officer in charge of the detachment. 'You see well you are preventing those who have a right to enter from passing to the gate.'

'Cap de Bious! I know one who will pass if all the bourgeois on earth were between him and the gate,' said, elbowing his way, the Gascon, who, by his rough answers, had attracted the admiration of Robert Briquet.

And, in fact, he was in an instant in the empty space

which had been formed, thanks to the Swiss, between the two masses of spectators.

The Gascon marched on proudly, discovering, through his thin green doublet, every muscle of his body, which seemed so many cords stretched by some interior machine. His wrists, dry and bony, exceeded by three good inches, his seedy ruffles; his eye was clear, his hair yellow and crispy, either naturally or by chance, for the dust had the greatest share in the colour. His feet, large and supple, were set in a shin-bone as fine and nervous as that of a deer. Upon one of his hands only he had drawn a glove of embroidered leather, quite surprised at finding itself destined to protect the outer skin rougher than itself; in his other hand he twirled a hazelnut switch.

For a moment he looked round him; then, supposing that the officer of whom we have spoken was the most considerable of the troop, he walked straight to him.

The latter regarded him for some time without speaking.

The Gascon, without being in the least abashed, did the same.

'Why, you have lost your hat, I think,' he said to him.

'Yes, sir.'

'Is it in the crowd?'

'No! I had received a letter from my mistress. I read it, Cap de Bious! near the river, a quarter of a league from hence, when suddenly a gust of wind carried off my hat and my letter. I ran after my letter, although the button of my hat was a single diamond. I recovered my letter. When I returned to my hat, the wind had blown it into the river, and the river carried it from Paris. It will make the fortune of some poor devil—so much the better.'

'So that you are bareheaded?'

'Are there not hats at Paris? Cap de Bious! I will purchase a more magnificent one, and I will place in it a diamond twice as large as the former.'

The officer imperceptibly shrugged his shoulders; but imperceptible as was this movement, it did not escape the Gascon.

'If you please?' said he.

'You have a card?' demanded the officer.

'Certainly, I have one, and rather more than one.'

'One will be sufficient, if it is in order.'

'Why, I am not mistaken,' continued the Gascon,

opening his enormous eyes; 'no, Cap de Bious, I am not wrong; I have the pleasure of speaking to Monsieur de Loignac.'

'It is possible, sir,' dryly replied the officer, evidently but little delighted at this recognition.

'To Monsieur de Loignac, my countryman?'

'I do not deny it.'

'My cousin?'

'Good! Your card.'

'Here it is.'

The Gascon drew from his glove the moiety of a card artistically cut.

'Follow me,' said Loignac, without looking at the card, 'you and your companions, if you have any; we will verify the passport.'

And he took his post near the gate.

The Gascon, still bareheaded, followed him; five other individuals followed the Gascon.

The first was covered by a magnificent cuirass, so beautifully worked, that it might be supposed the work of Benvenuto Cellini. But, as the pattern from which this cuirass had been made, had somewhat got out of fashion, this magnificence produced a smile rather than admiration.

The second, who kept pace, was followed by a tall, gray-headed lacquey, and, thin and sunburnt as he was, seemed the precursor of Don Quixote, as his servitor might have passed for that of Sancho.

The third appeared, carrying an infant of ten months old in his arms, followed by a woman, who clung to his leather belt, whilst two other children, one four the other five years old, clung to the robe of the woman.

The fourth appeared, limping, and attached to a large sword.

And, lastly, to close the march, a young man, with good features, advanced on a black horse, dusty, but of a good breed.

The latter, in the midst of the others, had the appearance of a king.

Compelled to move slowly, that he might not pass his colleagues, perhaps, in addition, inwardly satisfied not to walk too close to them, the young man remained for a moment on the limits of the hedge formed by the people.

At this instant he felt himself pulled by the sheath of his sword, and he turned himself round.

The individual who had thus attracted his attention was a young man, with black hair and sparkling eyes, small, frail, gracious, and his hands gloved.

'What can I do for you, sir?' demanded our cavalier.

'A favour, sir.'

'Speak, but speak quickly, I entreat you: you see they are waiting for me.'

'I wish to enter the city, sir; an imperative necessity—do you comprehend? You are alone, and want a page, who will do honour to your handsome face.'

'Well?'

'Well! let me enter, I will be your page.'

'Thank you,' said the cavalier; 'but I do not wish to be served by any one.'

'Not even by me?' said the young man, with a strange smile, which the cavalier felt was melting the frozen envelope in which he had endeavoured to enclose his heart.

'I meant that I could not maintain a page.'

'Yes, I know you are not rich, Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges,' said the young page.

The cavalier started; but, without paying attention to this movement, the youth continued:—

'We will not, therefore, talk about wages; and it is you, on the contrary, if you grant me what I have requested, who will be paid, and that a hundredfold, for the services you may render me. Allow me, then, to serve you, I pray, seeing that he who solicits you has sometimes ordered.'

'Come, then,' said the cavalier, subdued by the mixed tone of persuasion and authority.

The young man shook his hand, which was very familiar for a page; and, turning towards the group of cavaliers whom we have already mentioned:—

'I shall pass,' he said; 'tis the most important; you, Mayneville, endeavour to do the same, by any means whatever.'

'It is not enough that you pass,' replied the gentleman; 'he must see you.'

'Oh! be easy; the moment I have cleared this gate, he will see me.'

'Do not forget the sign agreed upon.'

'Two fingers on the lips, is it not?'

'Yes. Now may Heaven assist you.'

'Well!' said the owner of the black horse, 'Monsieur page, do we decide?'

'I am here, master,' replied the young man; and he vaulted nimbly, *en croupe*, behind his companion, who rejoined the five other chosen ones, who were occupied in exhibiting their cards, and proving their rights.'

'Ventre de biche!' said Robert Briquet, who had followed them with his eyes, 'here's a whole arrival of Gascons, or the devil fetch me!'

CHAPTER III

THE REVIEW

THE examination to which the six privileged individuals, whom we have seen issue from the ranks of the people, were subjected, on approaching the gate, was neither very long nor very complicated.

It consisted in taking the moiety of a card from the pocket, and presenting it to the officer, who compared it with another moiety; and if, on comparing them, the two moieties agreed and made a whole, the rights of the owner of the card were established.

The Gascon with his bare head approached the first. The review, therefore, commenced with him.

'Your name?' demanded the officer.

'My name!' It is written on the card, upon which you will also see something else.'

'Never mind; your name?' repeated the officer, with impatience; 'don't you know your name?'

'Do I know it! of course I do, Cap de Bious; and if I had forgotten it, you could have reminded me of it, since we are countrymen, and even cousins.'

'Your name! Do you fancy I can waste my time in recognitions?'

'Very good. My name is Perducas de Pincornay.'

'Perducas de Pincornay,' repeated M. de Loignac, to whom we shall henceforth give the name by which his compatriot had saluted him; and casting his eyes on the card:—

'Perducas de Pincornay, 26th October, 1585, at mid-day precisely.'

'Gate Saint Antoine,' added the Gascon, extending his dry and dusky finger over the card.

'Very well! it is in proper form; enter,' said M. de Loignac, to cut short any further dialogue between him and his countryman. 'Now for you!' he said to the second.

The man with the cuirass approached.

'Your card?' demanded Loignac.

'Eh, what! M. de Loignac,' he exclaimed, 'don't you recognise the son of one of the friends of your youth whom you have twenty times danced on your knee?'

'No.'

'Pertinax de Montcrabeau,' replied the young man with astonishment, 'you do not recognise him?'

'When I am on duty, I recognise no one. Your card, sir?'

The young man drew forth his card.

'Pertinax Montcrabeau, 26th October, midday precisely, gate Saint Antoine; pass.'

The young man passed, and, a little confounded at his reception, rejoined Perducas, who waited for the gate to be opened.

The third Gascon approached; the one with the wife and children.

'Your card?' demanded Loignac.

His obedient hand at once plunged into a little leather bag which he wore on the right side.

But it was in vain; encumbered as he was with the child in his arms he could not find the paper he wanted.

'What the devil do you do with that child, sir, you see plainly he is in your way?'

'Tis my son, Monsieur de Loignac.'

'Well! place your son on the ground.'

The Gascon obeyed, the child began to squall.

'So, you are married then?' demanded Loignac.

'Yes, sir.'

'At twenty?'

'They marry young in our parts; you know it well, Monsieur de Loignac, you who were married at eighteen.'

'Good!' said Loignac, 'here is another who knows me.'

In the meantime the woman had approached, and the children hanging to her gown had followed her.

'And why should he not be married?' she asked, drawing herself up and removing from her forehead the black hair which the dust from the road had fixed there like a crust; 'is it out of fashion to marry at Paris? Yes, sir, he is married, and here are two other children who call him father.'

'Yes, but who are only the sons of my wife, Monsieur de Loignac, as well as this great boy who keeps himself behind; advance, Militor, and salute Monsieur de Loignac, our countryman.'

A lad about sixteen or seventeen years of age, strong, active, and like a falcon for his round eye and hooked nose, approached, his two hands passed into his buff leather belt; he was dressed in a good cassock of knitted wool, wore on his muscular legs chamois leather breeches, and a precocious moustache shaded his sensual and also impudent upper lip.

'Tis Militor, my step-son, Monsieur de Loignac, my wife's eldest son, who is a Chavantrade, a relation of the Loignacs. Militor de Chavantrade, at your service. Salute then, Militor.'

And stooping towards the infant who was rolling and crying on the ground,—

'Be quiet, Scipio, be quiet, my child,' he added, fumbling in every pocket for his card.

During this time Militor, to obey the injunction of his father, slightly bowed, but without removing his hand from his belt.

'For the love of God, your card, sir,' exclaimed Loignac impatiently.

'Come here and assist me, Lardille,' said the blushing Gascon to his wife.

Lardille loosened, one after another, the two hands clinging to her frock, and searched, herself, the bag, and the pockets of her husband.

'Well!' she said, 'we must have lost it.'

'In that case, I must stop you,' said Loignac.

The Gascon became pale.

'My name is Eustache de Miradoux,' said he; 'and I am recommended by M. de Sainte Maline, my relation.'

'Ah! you are related to M. de Sainte Maline?' said Loignac, a little softened. 'It is true, that if we listened to them, they are related to all the world. Well, search again; and, mind, search to some purpose.'

'Look, Lardille, look into the clothes of your children,' said Eustache, trembling with vexation and alarm.

Lardille knelt down before a small bundle of modest effects, which she rummaged over, murmuring all the time.

The young Scipio continued to roll and scream; it is true, that his step-brothers, finding they were taken no notice of, amused themselves by pouring the sand into his mouth.

Militor did not budge. One would have said, the miseries of a family life passed over or under this great youth without reaching him.

'Eh! said M. de Loignac suddenly, 'what do I see there on the sleeve of that booby, wrapped up in leather?'

'Yes, yes, that's it,' exclaimed Eustache triumphantly; 'twas an idea of Lardille's—I remember it now; she sewed the card on Militor.'

'That he might carry something,' said Loignac ironically. 'Fie, the great calf! he can't even let his arms at liberty, fearing he should have to carry them.'

Militor's lips grew pale with rage, whilst in his face the blood showed itself on the nose, the chin, and eyebrows.

'A calf has no arms,' he grumbled, looking daggers; 'he has paws, like certain gentry of my acquaintance.'

'Peace!' said Eustache, 'you know, Militor, that M. de Loignac does us the honour of jesting with us.'

'No, faith, I am not jesting,' replied Loignac, 'on the contrary I wish the great dolt to take my words as I said them. If he were my step-son, I would make him carry mother, brother, bundle, and by St Denis, I would mount on the top of all, just to stretch his ears to prove to him he is nothing but an ass.'

Militor lost all countenance; Eustache seemed uneasy; but under this uneasiness there beamed a sort of joy at the humiliation inflicted on his step-son.

Lardille, to remove all difficulties, and save her first-born from the sarcasms of M. de Loignac, presented to the officer the card disencumbered of its leather envelope.

M. de Loignac took it and read it.

'Eustache de Miradoux, 26th October, midday precisely, gate Saint Antoine.'

'Pass on,' said he, 'and see that you don't forget either of your brats, ugly or handsome.'

Eustache de Miradoux took the young Scipio in his arms; Lardille again fastened to his girdle; the two children seized on the robe of their mother, and this family bunch, followed by the silent Militor, ranged themselves near those who waited after the required examination.

'Plague!' muttered Loignac between his teeth, regarding Eustache de Miradoux and his train make its evolution, 'a plague of soldiers Monsieur d'Epéron will have there.'

And turning round,—

'Come, you are next!' he said.

These words were addressed to the fourth candidate.

He was alone, and very prim, bringing together his thumb and middle finger to give a flip to his iron gray doublet and shake the dust from it; his moustache, which seemed made of cat's hairs, his green sparkling eyes, his eyebrows, round which the arcade formed a half circle over two protruding eye-balls, lastly his thin lips, impressed his physiognomy with that type of mistrust and parsimonious reserve by which we can recognise the man who conceals the length of his purse as well as the depth of his heart.

'Chalabre, 26th October, midday precisely, gate Saint Antoine.'

'Right, go!' said Loignac.

'I presume the expenses of the journey will be allowed,' mildly observed the Gascon.

'I am not treasurer, sir,' said Loignac dryly, 'I am only porter; pass.'

Chalabre passed.

Behind Chalabre came a cavalier young and fair haired, who, on drawing out his card, dropped from his pocket several checkered cards.

He declared himself to be called Saint Capautel, and his declaration was confirmed by his card, which was in proper form; he followed Chalabre.

There remained the sixth, who, on the injunction of the extempore page, had dismounted from his horse, and exhibited to M. de Loignac a card on which was written,—

'Ernauton de Carmainges, 26th October, midi precis, gate Saint Antoine.'

Whilst M. de Loignac read, the page, having also dismounted, endeavoured to conceal his face by fixing the curb, already in its proper place, of the horse of his false master.

'The page is yours, sir ?' inquired Loignac of Ernauton, pointing with his finger to the young man.

'You see, captain,' said Ernauton, who would neither betray nor lie; 'you see that he is bridling my horse.'

'Pass,' said Loignac, examining with attention M. de Carmainges, whose figure and dress appeared to him more in keeping than that of the others.

'Here is one bearable, at any rate,' he murmured.

Ernauton remounted his horse; the page, without affectation, but without slowness, had preceded him, and had already mixed in the group of those before him.

'Open the gate,' said Loignac, 'and allow these six persons and their suite to pass.'

'Come, quick, quick, my master,' said the page, 'in saddle, and let us start.'

Ernauton again yielded to the ascendancy exercised over him by this strange creature, and, the gate being opened, he spurred his horse, and, guided by the indications of the page, he plunged into the very heart of the Faubourg Saint Antoine.

Loignac ordered the gate to be closed upon the six chosen individuals, to the great discontent of the crowd, which, the formality being gone through, supposed it would pass in its turn; but finding their expectation deceived, loudly proclaimed their dissatisfaction.

Maitre Miton, who had, after a terrified race over the fields, slowly resumed his courage, and, sounding the ground at every step, had finished by returning to the place from which he had started; Maitre Miton, we say, hazarded some complaints on the arbitrary fashion in which the soldiers intercepted the communications.

Neighbour Friard, who had succeeded in finding his wife, and, protected by her, seemed now to fear nothing, narrated to his august half the news of the day, enriched by his own commentaries.

At length the cavaliers, one of whom was named Mayneville by the little page, held a council to know if they should not turn the wall of the enclosure, in the well founded hope of finding some breach in it, and by this breach to enter Paris, without the necessity of

presenting themselves any longer before the gate of Saint Antoine, or at any other.

Robert Briquet, like a philosopher who analyses and knows how to extract the essence, discovered that all the *dénouement* of the scene we have recounted as taking place near the gate, that the particular conversations of the cavaliers, the bourgeois, and the peasants, had given him not the slightest information.

He therefore approached as near as possible to a small shed which served as a porter's lodge, and which was lighted by two windows, the one opening into Paris, the other looking into the country.

Scarcely had he installed himself at his new post, when a man, hastening from the interior of Paris, at a swift gallop, jumped from his horse, and, entering the lodge, appeared at the window.

'Ah ! ah !' said Loignac.

'Here I am, Monsieur de Loignac,' said the man.

'Right; where do you come from ?'

'From the gate Saint Victor.'

'Your number ?'

'Five.'

'The cards ?'

'Are here.'

Loignac took the cards, verified them, and wrote on a slate, which seemed to have been prepared for this purpose, the number five.

The messenger departed.

Five minutes had not elapsed when two other messengers arrived.

Loignac questioned them successively, and always through his wicket.

One came from the gate of the Temple, and announced the figure 6.

The other from the gate Bourdelle, and bore the figure 4.

Loignac wrote these numbers with care on his slate.—

These messengers disappeared like the first, and were successively replaced by four others, who arrived :—

The first from the gate Saint Denis, with the figure 5.

The second from the gate Saint Jacques, with the figure 3.

The third from the gate Saint Honoré, with the figure 8.

The fourth from the gate Montmartre, with the figure 4.

A last at length appeared from the gate Bussy, with the figure 4.

Loignac then wrote out in lines, and with attention, the places and figures following :—

Gate Saint Victor	5
Gate Bourdelle	4
Gate du Temple	6
Gate Saint Denis	5
Gate Saint Jacques	3
Gate Saint Honoré	8
Gate Montmartre	4
Gate Bussy	4
Gate Saint Antoine	6

Total, Forty-five 45

‘ ‘Tis well.’

‘Now,’ cried Loignac, in a loud voice, ‘open the gates, and enter who choose.’

The gates were opened.

Immediately horses, mules, women, children, carts, rushed into Paris, at the risk of being stifled by the contraction of the two pillars of the drawbridge.

In a quarter of an hour, the whole mass of this populous tide, which, since the morning, had sojourned round this momentary dyke, defiled by this vast artery called the Rue de Saint Antoine.

The murmurs died away by degrees.

M. de Loignac remounted his horse with his men.

Robert Briquet, remaining to the last after being the first, philosophically bestrode the chain of the bridge, saying,—

‘All these people wished to see something, and they have seen nothing, even of their business: I wished to see nothing, and I am the only one who has seen anything. ’Tis very engaging—let us continue; but what good to continue? I know enough of it. Will it be very advantageous to me to see M. de Salcède torn into four quarters? No, pardieu! Besides, I have renounced politics.’

‘Come, dinner; the sun would mark midday if there was a sun; it is time,’ he said, and entered Paris with his easy and malicious smile.

CHAPTER IV

THE LODGE EN GRÈVE OF HIS MAJESTY KING
HENRY THE THIRD

IF we now follow to the Place de Grève, where it halted; this living mass of the quarter Saint Antoine, we shall find amongst the crowd several of our acquaintance; but whilst all these poor citizens, not so wise as Robert Briquet, are pushing, elbowing, and fighting each other, we prefer (thanks to the privilege our historical wings give us) transporting ourselves to the *place* itself, and when we have embraced the whole spectacle by one *coup d'œil*, returning for an instant to the past, in order that we may examine the cause after having contemplated the effect.

We might say that Maitre Friard was right in calculating at a hundred thousand men, at least, the number of spectators who would crowd into the Place de Grève, and its neighbourhood, to enjoy the spectacle which was preparing there. All Paris had met at the Hotel de Ville, and Paris is very punctual. Paris never fails at a fête; and it is a fête, and a very extraordinary one, that of the death of a man, when he has known how to stir up so many passions, that some curse him, others glorify him, whilst the greatest number pity him.

The spectator who might succeed in arriving at the *place*, whether from the quay near the cabaret of the Image of Notre-Dame, or from the porch even of the Place de la Beaudoyer, would at first perceive, in the middle of the Grève, the archers of the lieutenant of the short robe, Tanchon, and a good number of Swiss and light horse surrounding a small scaffold elevated about four feet.

This scaffold, so low that it was only visible to those round it, or to such as had the happiness to secure a place at some window, waited for the patient, who, since the morning, had been in the hands of the priests, and for whom, according to the energetic expression of the people, his horses waited, to take him the long journey.

In fact, under an archway of the first house, after the Rue du Mouton in the Place, four vigorous horses from Perche, with white manes and hairy legs, stamped

impatiently on the pavement, and bit at one another, and neighed, to the great terror of the women who had chosen this place of their own accord, or had been driven there by the crowd.

The horses were fresh ones; scarcely had they at times, in the grassy plains of their native country, carried on their broad backs the chubby infant of some sturdy peasant, delayed in his return from the fields when the sun has set.

But after the empty scaffold, after the neighing steeds, that which attracted, in a more constant degree, the attention of this crowd, was the principal window at the Hotel de Ville, hung with gold and red velvet, and from the balcony of which depended a velvet carpet, ornamented with the royal escutcheon.

In fact, this window was the lodge of the King.

Half-past one struck from Saint Jean en Grève, when this window, like the frame of a picture, filled with personages who were to be included in it.

The first was the King, Henry the Third, pale, nearly bald, although at this period he was not more than thirty-four or thirty-five years of age; his eye was sunk in its dark orbit, and his mouth quite trembling with nervous contractions.

He entered sullen; his look fixed, majestic, and unsteady; singular in his dress, singular in his carriage; a shadow rather than a living being; a spectre rather than a king; a mystery always incomprehensible and always unappreciated by his subjects, who, on seeing him appear, knew not whether to cry 'Vive le roi!' or 'Pray for his soul.'

Henry was dressed in a black doublet, with black fringe; he had neither orders nor jewels, with the exception of a single diamond which sparkled in his loquet or cap, serving as an agraffe to three short and curly feathers. In his left hand he held a little black dog, which his sister-in-law, Mary Stuart, had sent him from her prison, and upon whose silky coat shone his small and white fingers, like fingers of alabaster.

Behind him came Catherine de Medicis, already bent with age, for the Queen-Mother might, at this period, have been sixty-five or sixty-seven years of age; but still carrying her head firm and erect, launching from beneath her frowning eyebrows a piercing look, and, despite

this look, always cold and stately, like a statue of wax, in the garments of eternal mourning.

In the same line appeared the mild and melancholy figure of the Queen, Louise de Lorraine, wife of Henry the Third, in appearance an insignificant companion, but faithful in the reality of his noisy and important life.

The Queen-Mother, Catherine de Medicis, advanced to a triumph.

The Queen, Louise, assisted at an execution.

King Henry treated it as an *affair*.

A triple cloud, which might be read on the haughty front of the first, on the features of resignation of the second, and on the misty and wearied forehead of the third.

In the train of these illustrious individuals whom the people admired, so pale and so silent, followed two handsome young men, the one about twenty, and the other twenty-five, at the most.

They were arm in arm, notwithstanding the etiquette which forbids, in the presence of majesty—as in church, before God—that men should appear to cleave to anything.

They smiled.

The youngest, with an ineffable sadness; the other, with an enchanting grace. They were handsome, they were tall, they were brothers.

The youngest was named Henri de Joyeuse, Count du Bouchage; the other, the Duke Anne de Joyeuse. More recently he had been known at court by the name of Arques; but King Henry, who loved him above everything, had, about a year previous, created him a peer of France, by advancing to a dukedom the earlship of Joyeuse.

The people had not, for this favourite, the hatred it formerly bore to Maugiron, to Quelus, and to Schomberg, a hatred which d'Epemon alone had inherited.

The people, therefore, received the prince and the two brothers, with modest but flattering acclamations.

Henry saluted the crowd gravely and without a smile; he then kissed his little dog on the head.

And turning round towards the two young men:—

'Lean with your back against the tapestry, Anne,' said he to the eldest; 'don't fatigue yourself by remaining standing, it will be some time, perhaps.'

'I hope so truly,' interrupted Catherine, 'long and good, sire.'

'You think that Salcède will speak, then, my mother?' said Henry.

'God, I hope, will thus confute our enemies; I say our enemies, for they are your enemies also, my daughter,' she added, turning towards the Queen, who turned pale, and bent her mild looks to the ground.

The King shook his head in token of his doubt.

And turning a second time towards Joyeuse, and seeing that the latter remained standing, *maugrè* his invitation:—

'Come, Anne,' said he, 'do as I said; place your back against the wall, or lean on my *fauteuil*.'

'Your Majesty is really too good,' said the young duke; 'and I will not profit by the permission until I am somewhat fatigued.'

'And we will not wait till you are; eh, my brother?' said Henry, in a whisper.

'Be easy,' replied Anne, with his eyes rather than his voice.

'My son,' said Catherine, 'do I not see a tumult below there, at the corner of the quay?'

'How quick-sighted! my mother. Yes, in fact, I think you are right. Oh! what bad eyesight I have, although not yet old.'

'Sire,' interrupted Joyeuse freely, 'the uproar arises from the crowding of the populace into the place, by the company of archers. 'Tis the condemned who arrives, most certainly,

'How flattering it is to kings,' said Catherine, 'to view the quartering of a man who has a drop of royal blood in his veins.'

And in saying these words her glance fell upon Louise.

'Oh! madame, pardon me, spare me!' said the young Queen, with a despair she in vain endeavoured to mask; 'no! this monster is not of my family; and you could not mean to say he is.'

'No, certainly!' said the King, 'and I am quite certain my mother did not mean to say so.'

'Eh! but,' said Catherine sharply, 'he holds with the Lorraines, and the Lorraines are yours, madame; at least I think so. This Salcède touches you therefore, and closely.'

'Which means,' interrupted Joyeuse, with an honest indignation which was the distinctive trait of his character, and which showed itself on every occasion against the person who excited it, whoever he might be; 'which means, that he touches M. de Guise, perhaps, but not the Queen of France.'

'Ah! you are there, Monsieur de Joyeuse?' said Catherine, with an indescribable haughtiness, and rendering a humiliation for a contradiction. 'Ah! you are there? I did not see you.'

'I am here, not only with the permission, but also by the command, of the King, madame,' replied Joyeuse, regarding Henry the Third. 'It is not so amusing an affair to see a man quartered, that I should assist at such a spectacle, if I were not forced to it.'

'Joyeuse is right, madame,' said the King; 'here, it concerns neither the Lorraines nor the Guises, and especially not the Queen; we are here to see separated into four quarters, M. de Salcède, that is to say, an assassin who would have killed my brother.'

'I am unlucky to-day,' said Catherine, suddenly yielding, which was her most skilful mode of attack; 'I have made my daughter weep, and, may God pardon me, I think I have made M. de Joyeuse laugh.'

'Ah! madame,' exclaimed Louise, seizing Catherine's hands; 'is it possible that your Majesty despises my grief?'

'And my profound respect,' added Anne de Joyeuse, leaning on the arms of the royal fauteuil.

'It's true, it's true,' replied Catherine, burying another shaft in the heart of her daughter-in-law, 'I ought to know how painful it is to you, my dear child, to see unmasked the complots of your allies of Lorraine, and although you may not be with them, you will not the less suffer for this relationship.'

'Ah, as for that, my mother, 'tis somewhat true,' said the King, endeavouring to make peace amongst them, 'for this time, we know what to think of the participation of M. de Guise in this complot.'

'But, sire,' interrupted Louise de Lorraine, more boldly than she had yet done, 'your Majesty well knows that in becoming Queen of France, I left my relations far below the throne.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Anne de Joyeuse, 'you see that I was

not mistaken, sire; here is the sufferer, who appears on the place! Corbleu, what a villainous figure!

'He is frightened,' said Catherine, 'he will speak.'

'If he has the strength,' said the King. 'Look, then, my mother, his head reels like that of a corpse.'

'I own it, sire,' said Joyeuse, 'it is frightful.'

'How would you have it otherwise, a man whose thoughts are so ugly? Have I not explained to you, Anne, the secret reports of physics and morality, as Hippocrates and Galenus understood them, and have themselves explained them?'

'I do not deny it, sire; but I am not a pupil equal to yourself, and I have sometimes seen very ugly men make very brave soldiers. Is it not so, Henri?'

Joyeuse turned towards his brother, as if to call in his approbation to his assistance; but Henri regarded without seeing, listened without hearing; he was plunged in a deep reverie; it was the King, therefore, who replied for him.

'Eh! mon Dieu! my dear Anne,' he exclaimed, 'who tells you that this one is not brave? He is so, pardieu, like a bear, like a wolf, like a serpent. Do you not remember his deeds? He burnt in his house, a Norman gentleman, his enemy; he has fought ten times, and has killed three of his adversaries; he has been surprised coining false money, and condemned to death for this act.'

'In tokens of which,' said Catherine de Medicis, 'he has been pardoned by the intercession of M. the Duke de Guise, your cousin, my daughter.'

This time Louise had expended her strength; she contented herself with heaving a deep sigh.

'Come,' said Joyeuse, 'tis a life well spent, and which will soon have an end.'

'I hope, Monsieur de Joyeuse,' said Catherine, 'that it will, on the contrary, finish as slowly as possible.'

'Madame,' said Joyeuse, shaking his head, 'I see below there under the awning, such good horses, and which seem to me so impatient at being obliged to remain there doing nothing, that I do not think there will be great resistance in the tendons, muscles, and cartilages of M. de Salcède.'

'Yes, if they do not provide against such a case; but my son is merciful,' added the Queen, with one of those smiles which belonged to herself alone, 'he will have the assistants told to draw gently.'

'And yet, madame,' timidly objected the younger Queen, I heard you say this morning to Madame de Mercœur, at least I thought so, that the miserable wretch would suffer but two jerks.'

'Just so, if he conducts himself well,' said Catherine; 'in that case he will be despatched as quickly as possible; but you hear, my daughter, and I would, since you take some interest in him, that you had it made known to him; if he conducts himself well, that is his affair.'

'My only reason was, Madame,' said Louise, 'that Providence not having blessed me with your strength, I am not very anxious to witness sufferings.'

'Well, you will turn aside your eyes then, my daughter.' Louise was silent.

The King had heard nothing; he was all eyes; for they were occupied in lifting the patient from the cart which had brought him, to place him on the small scaffold.

During this time, the halberdiers, the archers, and the Swiss had considerably enlarged the space, so that round the scaffold there was sufficient room for every eye to distinguish Salcède, despite the slight elevation of his funeral pedestal.

Salcède might have been thirty-four or thirty-five years of age; he was strong and active; the pallid features of his countenance, upon which rested, like pearls, a few drops of blood and sweat, were animated when he looked round him with an indescribable expression, sometimes of hope, sometimes of despair.

He had at the first moment glanced at the royal lodge; but as if he comprehended that, in lieu of life, it was death that came from thence, his regard was not again fixed there.

'Twas amongst the crowd he sought, it was in the bosom of this stormy sea that he searched with his burning eyes, and his soul trembling on the brink of his lips.

The crowd was silent.

Salcède was not a common assassin; Salcède in the first place was of good birth, since Catherine de Medicis, who was a much better connoisseur in genealogy than she pretended, had discovered a drop of royal blood in his veins; besides, Salcède had been a captain of some renown. That hand, bound by a disgraceful cord, had valiantly wielded a sword; that livid head, on which was

painted the terrors of death, terrors which the patient would have buried at the bottom of his soul probably, if hope had not taken up so large a space there, this livid head had sheltered some grand designs.

From what we have said it resulted that for many of the spectators Slacède was a hero; in the opinion of many others he was a victim; some really looked upon him as an assassin, but the crowd with difficulty admits to its contempt, in the rank of ordinary criminals, those who have attempted great murders, which are registered in the page of history, as well as in that of justice.

Thus it was, therefore, that the crowd narrated how Salcède was born of a race of warriors; that his father had fought against Cardinal de Lorraine, which had cost him a glorious death in the midst of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, but that the son, forgetful of this death, or rather sacrificing his hatred to a certain ambition, for which the populace has always some sympathy, that this son, we said, had entered into a compact with Spain and the Guises, to annihilate in Flanders the increasing power of the Duke of Anjou, so much hated by the French.

They cited his relations with Baza and Balouin, the suspected authors of this conspiracy, which had nearly cost the life of the Duke Francis, brother of Henry the Third; they cited the address he had displayed in all these proceedings to escape the wheel, the gibbet, and the stake, on which still smoked the blood of his accomplices; alone he had, by revelations, false and full of artifice, as the Lorraines said, allured his judges to such a point, that, to know more, the Duke of Anjou, sparing him for the moment, had him conducted to France, instead of having him beheaded at Antwerp or Brussels. It is true, that the result was the same; but on the journey, which was the object of his revelations, Salcède hoped to be liberated by his partisans; unfortunately for him, he had reckoned without M. de Bellievre, who had taken so much care, that neither Spaniards nor Lorraines nor Leaguers were enabled to approach him.

In prison, Salcède had hoped; at the torture Salcède had hoped; in the cart he had still hoped; and on the scaffold hope had not deserted him. It was not that he lost his courage, or failed in resignation; but he was one of those creatures who defend themselves to the last

breath with that tenacity and vigour, which minds less strongly organised seldom attain.

Nor did the King, any more than the people, lose this incessant thought of Salcède.

Catherine, on her part, studied with anxiety the least movement of the unfortunate young man; but she was at too great a distance to follow the direction of his eyes, and remark their continual play.

On the arrival of the patient, there rose, like enchantment, in the crowd, stages of men, women, and children. Each time that he perceived a fresh head above the moving level, already measured by the vigilant eye of Salcède, he analysed it completely in a second, which sufficed as well as an hour this over-excited organisation, in which time, now becoming so precious, had increased tenfold, ay a hundredfold, all the faculties.

After this rapid scrutiny, Salcède would become sullen, and turn his attention elsewhere.

The executioner, however, had commenced taking possession of him, and he bound him by the centre of his body to the centre of the scaffold.

Already, even, by a sign from Maitre Tanchon, lieutenant of the short robe, and superintending the execution, two archers, piercing the crowd, were gone to seek the horses.

Under any other circumstances, or with any other intention, the archers would not have been enabled to move a step through the midst of this compact mass, but the crowd knew what the archers went to do, and it drew close and gave passage; as on an encumbered theatre, they always give place to the actors charged with important parts.

At this moment there was some noise at the door of the royal lodge, and the usher, raising the tapestry, informed their Majesties that the president Brisson and four councillors, one of whom was the reporter of the case, desired to have the honour of speaking for a moment with the King on the subject of the execution.

"'Tis wonderful," said the King.

And turning towards Catherine,—

'Well! my mother,' he continued, 'you will be satisfied.'

Catherine slightly inclined her head by way of approbation.

'Introduce these gentlemen,' said the King.

'Sire, a favour,' demanded Joyeuse.

'Speak, Joyeuse,' said the King, 'and provided it be not that of the condemned.'

'Reassure yourself, sire.'

'I am listening.'

'Sire, there is one thing which particularly wounds the sight of my brother, and especially of myself, which is the red robes and the black robes; will your Majesty, therefore, be good enough to permit us to retire?'

'How! you are so little interested in my affairs, M. de Joyeuse, that you ask to retire at such a moment?' exclaimed Henry.

'Do not believe it, sire; whatever touches your Majesty has a deep interest for me; but I am of a miserable organisation, and the weakest woman is, on this point, stronger than I am. I cannot see an execution, but I am ill for a week. But as there are now none but myself at court who laugh, since my brother, I know not why, no longer laughs, consider what would become of the poor Louvre, already so gloomy, if I bethink myself of rendering it still more gloomy. Thus, sire, for pity's——'

'You would quit me, Anne?' said Henry, in a tone of sadness.

'Plague, sire, you are insatiate; you want vengeance and a show at the same time; and what a spectacle, that of which, unlike myself, you are the most curious, vengeance and a spectacle do not suffice you, and you must at the same time enjoy the weakness of your friends.'

'Remain, Joyeuse, remain; you will see that it is interesting.'

'I do not doubt it; I even fear, as I have told your Majesty, that the interest will reach a point I could not sustain; you will, therefore, permit, sire?'

And Joyeuse made a movement towards the door.

'Well! well!' said Henry the Third, sighing, 'have your own way, my destiny is to live alone.'

And the King, his brow contracted, turned to his mother, fearing she had heard the colloquy which had passed between him and his favourite.

The hearing of Catherine was as clear as her sight; but when she desired not to hear, no ear was closer than hers.

In the meantime, Joyeuse had stooped to the ear of his brother, and had said to him,—

‘Quick, quick! du Bouchage. Whilst these councillors are entering, glide behind their large robes and let us escape; the King says “yes” now, in five minutes he will say “no.”’

‘Thanks! thanks! my brother,’ replied the young man; ‘I was like you, I was in a hurry to quit.’

‘Come, come, the vultures are appearing; disappear, tender nightingale.’

In fact, behind the councillors, the two young men might be seen flying like two rapid spectres.

Upon them fell the heavy tapestry.

When the King turned round, they had already disappeared.

Henry heaved a deep sigh, and kissed his little dog.

CHAPTER V

THE EXECUTION

THE councillors remained at the lower end of the room, standing and silent, waiting for the King to address them.

The King allowed them to wait for a moment, then, turning towards them,—

‘Well, gentlemen, what news?’ he said. ‘Good-morning, Monsieur Brisson.’

‘Sire,’ replied the president, with his easy dignity, which, at court, was called his Huguenot courtesy, ‘we come to supplicate your Majesty, as M. de Thou has also desired, to prolong the life of the condemned. No doubt he has some revelations to make; and, by promising him his life, we shall obtain them.’

‘But,’ said the King, ‘have they not obtained them, monsieur le president?’

‘Yes, sire, in part—is it sufficient for your Majesty?’

‘I know what I know, monsieur.’

‘Your Majesty then knows what to think of the participation of Spain in this affair.’

‘Of Spain? Yes, monsieur le president, and also of many other powers.’

‘It will be important to verify this participation, sire.’

'And therefore,' interrupted Catherine, 'the King intends, monsieur le president, to defer the execution, if the condemned signs a confession analagous to his depositions before the judge, who ordered the question to be inflicted upon him.'

Brisson interrogated the King with his eyes.

'Such is my intention,' said Henry, 'and I do not any longer conceal it. You may assure yourself of it, Monsieur Brisson, by having it mentioned to the patient by your lieutenant of the robe.'

'Your Majesty has nothing further to recommend ?'

'Nothing. But no variation in the confessions, or I withdraw my hand. They are public—they must be complete.'

'Yes, sire, with the names of the persons compromised ?'

'With the names—all the names. Even should these names be those of my nearest relations !' said the King.

'It shall be done as your Majesty orders.'

'I will explain myself, Monsieur Brisson. Let there be no mistake. You will carry pens and paper to the condemned. He will write his confession; thereby showing publicly that he throws himself upon our mercy. Afterwards, we shall see.'

'But I may promise ?'

'Oh, yes ! always promise.'

'Come, gentlemen,' said the president, dismissing the councillors.

And having respectfully saluted the King, he followed his companions.

'He will speak, sire,' said Louise de Lorraine, trembling; 'he will speak, and your Majesty will pardon. See how the foam rises to his lips.'

'No, no; he seeks,' said Catherine, 'he seeks, and nothing else. What does he seek, then ?'

'Parbleu,' said King Henry, 'it is not difficult to guess, He seeks Monsieur the Duke of Parma, Monsieur the Duke de Guise; he seeks Monsieur my brother, the most Catholic King. Ah ! seek ! seek ! Wait, think you the Place de Grève is a more convenient spot for an ambush than the road to Flanders ? Think you that I have not here a hundred Bellievres to prevent your descending from the scaffold, to which a single one conducted you ?'

Salcède had seen the archers leave to fetch the horses; he had seen the president and the councillors in the

king's lodge; he had not seen them disappear; he concluded that the King had given the order for his execution.

It was then that there appeared on his livid mouth that bloody foam remarked by the young Queen; the unhappy man, in the mortal impatience which devoured him, had bitten his lips till they bled.

'No one! no one!' he murmured. 'Not one of those who had promised me assistance. Cowards! cowards! cowards!'

Tanchon, the lieutenant, approached the scaffold, and, addressing the executioner, 'Prepare, Maitre,' he said.

The executioner made a sign to the other end of the place, and then were seen the horses, separating the crowd, and leaving behind them a noisy track, which, like that of the sea, closed after them.

This track was occasioned by the spectators, who drew back or hindered the rapid passage of the horses; but the demolished ranks soon filled again, and at times the first became last, and vice versa, for the strongest rushed into the empty space.

At the corner of the Rue de la Vannerie, there might also be seen, when the horses passed it, a handsome young man of our acquaintance jump down from the post upon which he had mounted, pushed by a youth, who appeared not more than fifteen or sixteen years of age, but very anxious about this terrible spectacle.

This was the mysterious page and the Viscount Ernauton de Carmainges.

'Eh! quick, quick,' whispered the page into the ear of his companion, 'throw yourself into the opening, there is not a moment to lose.'

'But we shall be stifled,' replied Ernauton; 'you are mad, my little friend.'

'I want to see! to see close!' said the page, in so imperious a tone, that it was easy to conclude that the words came from a mouth in the habit of commanding.

Ernauton obeyed.

'Lay hold of the horses! lay hold of the horses!' said the page; 'do not quit them an inch, or we shall not arrive there.'

'But before we arrive you will be trampled to pieces.'

'Don't trouble yourself about me. Forwards! forwards!'

'The horses will kick.'

'Seize the tail of the last; a horse will never kick when he is held in this way.'

Ernauton submitted, despite himself, to the strange influence of the child; he obeyed, clung to the manes of the horses, whilst the page held by his waist.

And in the midst of this crowd, undulating like a sea, as thick as a forest, leaving here a flap of a cloak, there a fragment of their doublet, farther on the frill of a shirt, they arrived at the same time as the team, to within three steps of the scaffold, upon which Salcède was writhing in the convulsions of despair.

'Are we arrived?' murmured the young man, choking and out of breath, when he found Ernauton stop.

'Yes,' replied the Viscount, 'luckily, for my strength was gone.'

'I can't see.'

'Pass in front of me.'

'No, no, not yet; what are they doing?'

'Making running knots at the end of the cords.'

'And he! what is he about?'

'His eyes are round him everywhere, like the hawk on the wing.'

The horses were near enough to the scaffold for the assistants of the executioner to attach to the wrists and feet of Salcède the traces fixed to their collars.

Salcède uttered a groan, when he felt round his ankles the rude contact of the ropes, which a running-knot tightened round his flesh.

He then launched an all-embracing look over the whole immense place, with its hundred thousand spectators.

'Monsieur,' said Tanchon to him politely, 'does it please you to speak to the people before we proceed?'

And he approached the ear of the patient to add in a low tone,—

'A good confession to save your life.'

Salcède gazed at him, as if to penetrate to the very depths of his soul.

Salcède was not deceived! he comprehended that the lieutenant was sincere, and would perform what he promised.

'You see,' continued Tanchon, 'they abandon you; there is no other hope in this world but the one I offer you.'

'Well,' said Salcède, with a hoarse sigh, 'command silence, I am ready to speak.'

'Tis a confession written and signed, that the King expects.'

'In that case, unloose my hands, and give me a pen; I will write.'

'Your confession?'

'My confession.'

Tanchon, transported with joy, had but to make a sign; the case had been provided for. An archer held everything in readiness; they passed the inkstand, pens, and paper, which Tanchon placed on the boards of the scaffold.

At the same time they loosened about three feet of the cord fastened to Salcède's wrist, and raised him upon a seat, that he might write.

Salcède, at length seated, commenced by breathing hard, and making use of his hand to wipe his lip and brush back his hair, which fell humid with perspiration over his dark eyebrows.

'Come, come,' said Tanchon, 'put yourself at your ease, and write the whole.'

'Oh, never fear,' said Salcède, extending his hand towards the pen, 'be easy; I shall not forget those who forget me.'

And saying this he hazarded a last glance.

No doubt the moment had arrived for the page to show himself, for, seizing the hand of Ernauton:—

'Sir,' he said to him, 'for pity's sake take me in your arms and raise me above the heads which prevent my seeing.'

'Why, you are insatiable, young man, really.'

'This one service, sir.'

'You abuse.'

'I must see the condemned, do you hear? I must see.'

And as Ernauton did not reply quickly enough, seemingly, to this injunction,—

'Out of pity, sir, as a favour, I entreat you.'

The child was no longer a fantastic tyrant, but an irresistible suppliant.

Ernauton raised him in his arms, not without some astonishment at the delicacy of the figure which he pressed in his arms.

The head of the page towered above all the others.

Salcède was just reaching a pen after making his circular review.

He observed the head of the young man, and remained stupefied.

At this moment the two fingers of the page were pressed upon his lips; an irrepressible joy beamed over the face of the condemned.

He had recognised the signal he so impatiently waited for, and which announced to him assistance.

Salcède, after the contemplation of a few seconds, seized the paper offered him by Tanchon, uneasy at his hesitation, and commenced writing with a feverish activity.

'He writes, he writes,' murmured the crowd.

'He writes,' repeated the Queen-Mother, with an evident delight.

'He writes,' said the King, '*par la mordieu!* I will pardon him.'

Suddenly, Salcède interrupted himself to regard, once more, the young man. The latter repeated the same sign, and Salcède continued to write.

After a shorter interval he again stopped, to look once more.

This time, the page signed with his fingers and with his head.

'Have you finished?' said Tanchon, who did not lose sight of the paper.

'Yes,' said Salcède mechanically.

'Sign, then,'

Salcède signed, without casting a look upon the paper, his eyes being fixed on the young man.

Tanchon extended his hand towards the confession.

'To the King, to the King alone,' said Salcède.

And he delivered the paper to the lieutenant of the short robe, but with some hesitation, and like a conquered soldier yielding his last weapon.

'If you have well confessed the whole,' said the lieutenant, 'you are safe, M. de Salcède.'

A smile expressive of irony and uneasiness appeared on the lips of the sufferer, who seemed to question impatiently his mysterious friend.

At length Ernauton, fatigued, wished to deposit his troublesome burden; he opened his arms, the page slipped

to the ground. With him disappeared the vision which had supported the condemned.

When Salcède no longer beheld him, he sought him with his eyes; then, as if wild,—

‘Well!’ he cried, ‘well!’

No one replied to him.

‘Eh! quick, quick, make haste,’ he said, ‘the King has the paper; he is going to read.’

No one moved.

The King hastily unfolded the confession.

‘Oh! a thousand devils!’ cried Salcède, ‘have they made a dupe of me? I well recognised her, however. It was her, it was her!’

Scarcely had the King ran over the first lines ere he appeared seized with indignation.

He then turned pale and exclaimed,—

‘Oh! the miserable!—oh! the wicked man!’

‘What is it, my son?’ demanded Catherine.

‘It is, that he retracts, my mother; it is that he pretends never to have confessed anything.’

‘And what next?’

‘He next declares innocent, and strangers to this conspiracy, the MM. Guise.’

‘Well, and rightly,’ stammered Catherine, ‘if it be true.’

‘He lies!’ exclaimed the King; ‘he lies like a heathen.’

‘How do you know, my son? MM. Guise are perhaps calumniated. The judges, probably, in their too great zeal, have wrongly interpreted the depositions.’

‘Eh! madame,’ exclaimed Henry, not able to master himself longer, ‘I have heard all.’

‘You, my son?’

‘Yes, I.’

‘And how so, if you please?’

‘When the prisoner suffered the rack, I was behind a curtain; I did not lose a single word, and every one of these words are as firm in my head as a nail under the hammer.’

‘Well! let the rack make him speak, since he must have the rack; order the horses to draw.’

Henry, driven by his rage, raised his hand.

Tanchon, the lieutenant, repeated the sign.

Already were the cords attached to the four quarters of the patient; four men jumped upon the four horses;

four lashes of the whip resounded, and the four horses rushed forward in opposite directions.

A horrible cracking noise and a horrible cry rose from the platform of the scaffold. They saw the members of the miserable Salcède turn blue, lengthen, and eventually inject themselves with blood; his face was no longer that of a human being, it was the mask of a demon.

'Oh! treason! treason!' he cried. 'Well! I will speak, I wish to speak, and I will tell the whole. Ah! cursed duch——'

The voice rose above the neighing of the steeds and the murmurs of the crowd; but suddenly it ceased.

'Stay! stay!' cried Catherine.

It was too late. The head of Salcède, so lately erect with suffering and rage, suddenly fell on the floor of the scaffold.

'Let him speak,' vociferated the Queen Mother, 'stop, stop then.'

The eye of Salcède was unaccountably dilated, fixed, and obstinately directed to the group in which the page had appeared.

But Salcède could no longer speak, he was dead.

Tanchon gave some orders in a low tone to the archers, who commenced fighting their way through the crowd in the direction indicated by the denouncing looks of Salcède.

'I am discovered,' said the young page, to the ear of Ernauton; 'for pity's sake, assist me, help me, sir; they are coming, they are coming.'

'But what do you wish now?'

'To fly, do you see it is me they are seeking?'

'But who are you, then?'

'A woman, save me, protect me.'

Ernauton turned pale; but generosity got the better of astonishment and fear.

He placed the page before him, cut a road for him by using the hilt of his sword, and pushed him as far as the corner of the Rue du Mouton, towards an open door.

His young protégée rushed forward and disappeared in the doorway, which seemed to be waiting for him, for it closed behind him.

Hé had not even the time to ask his name, nor where he could again see him.

But on disappearing, the young page, as though he had guessed his thoughts, had made a sign full of promises.

Now freed, Ernauton turned towards the centre of the place, and surveyed at a single glance the scaffold and the royal lodge.

Salcède was stretched stiff and livid upon the scaffold.

Catherine was standing up in the lodge, pale and trembling.

'My son,' she said at length, wiping the perspiration from her forehead, 'my son, you will do well to change your executioner—he is a leaguer.'

'And why do you suspect so, my mother?' said Henry.

'Look, look.'

'Well! I am looking.'

'The horses had hardly begun to pull, when Salcède was dead.'

'Because he was too sensible to pain.'

'Not so, not so,' said Catherine, with a smile of contempt, drawn from her by the little perspicacity of her son; 'but because he has been strangled by a fine cord beneath the scaffold, at the moment he was about to accuse those who left him to die. Have the corpse inspected by a skilful doctor, and, my word on it, you will find round his neck the circle which the cord has left there.'

'You are right,' said Henry, whose eyes sparkled for a moment, 'my cousin of Guise is better served than I am.'

'Chut! chut! my son,' said Catherine, 'no scene, they will laugh at us; for this time 'tis again a failure.'

'Joyeuse did well to amuse himself elsewhere,' said the King; 'we can reckon on nothing in this world, not even on executions. Let us go, ladies, let us go.'

CHAPTER VI

THE BROTHERS JOYEUSE

MM. JOYEUSE, as we have seen, had escaped, during this spectacle, behind the Hotel de Ville, and leaving their lackeys, who waited for them with horses, to follow the King's equipages, they walked side by side in the streets of this populous quarter, which, on this day, were

deserted, so voracious of spectators was the Place de Grève.

Once outside, they walked arm in arm, but without speaking.

Henri, lately so joyous, was preoccupied, and almost gloomy.

Anne seemed uneasy, and as if embarrassed by the silence of his brother.

It was Anne, however, who first broke the silence.

'Well, Henri,' he said, 'where are you taking me?'

'I am not taking you at all, my brother, I walk before myself,' replied Henri, as if he had suddenly awakened.

'Do you wish to go anywhere, my brother?'

'And you?'

Henri smiled wistfully.

'Oh, as for me, I care little where I go.'

'You go somewhere, however, every night,' said Anne, 'for every evening you leave at the same hour, and do not return until nearly midnight, and sometimes do not return at all.'

'Do you question me, brother?' demanded Henri, with a charming sweetness, combined with a certain respect for his elder brother.

'I question you?' said Anne; 'God forbid; secrets are for those who keep them.'

'If you wish it, I shall have no secrets from you, brother,' replied Henri; 'you know it well.'

'You have no secrets from me, Henri?'

'Never, my brother. Are you not my seigneur, as well as my friend?'

'Faith! I thought you had some for me, who am but a poor layman; I thought you had our learned brother, that pillar of theology, that flame of religion, that orthodox architect in cases of court conscience, who will one day be a cardinal; that you confided in him, and that in him you found at once confession, absolution, and—who knows?—advice; for, in our family,' added Anne, laughing, 'we are all and everything—you know it—witness our very dear father.'

Henri du Bouchage seized the hand of his brother, and pressed it affectionately.

'To me you are more than a director, more than a confessor, more than a father, my dear Anne,' he said; 'I repeat that you are my friend.'

'Then why, my friend, is it that, from being gay, as formerly, I see you become so gloomy? and why, instead of going out by day, you never leave till night?'

'My brother, I am not gloomy,' replied Henri, smiling.

'What are you, then?'

'I am amorous.'

'Good. And this preoccupation?'

'Arises from my continually thinking of my love.'

'And you sigh in telling me this?'

'Yes.'

'You sigh? You, Henri, Count du Bouchage? the brother of Joyeuse? You, whom evil tongues call the third King of France? You know that M. de Guise is the second, if he is not the first. You, who are rich, you, who are handsome, you, who will be a peer of France, like me, and duke, like me, on the first opportunity I may find; you are amorous, you think and you sigh; you sigh, you who have taken for a device *hilariter* (gaily).'

'My dear Anne, all these gifts of the past, or all these promises for the future, have never been included by me in the rank of things which were to form my happiness. I have no ambition.'

'Which means that you have it no longer.'

'Or at least that I do not pursue the objects of which you speak.'

'At this moment, perhaps; but, by-and-by, you will return to them.'

'Never, my brother. I desire nothing, I wish for nothing.'

'Then you are wrong, my brother. When our name is Joyeuse, that is, one of the finest names in France; when our brother is a favourite of the King, we desire everything, we wish for everything, and we have everything.'

Henri dropped his fair head in a melancholy mood.

'Come,' said Anne, 'here we are quite alone, quite lost. The devil take me, we have passed the water, and here we are on the Pont de la Tournelle, and this without having noticed it. I do not think that on this isolated strand, with this cold breeze, near this green water, any one will come to listen to us. Have you anything serious to say to me, Henri.'

'Nothing, nothing, unless that I am in love, and that

you know already, my brother, since I told you so but now.'

'But the devil ! that is not serious,' said Anne, stamping with his foot; 'I also, by the pope ! am in love !'

'Not like me, my brother.'

'I also, sometimes think of my mistress.'

'Yes, but not always.'

'I also have disappointments, vexations even.'

'Yes, but you have also joys, for you are loved.'

'Oh ! I have grand obstacles too; they demand great mysteries from me.'

'They demand ? you said; they demand, my brother ? if your mistress exacts she is yours.'

'No doubt, she is mine; that is, mine and M. de Mayenne's; for, confidence for confidence, Henri, I have just the mistress of that lascivious de Mayenne, a girl who is mad for me, who would quit Mayenne on the very instant, were she not afraid he would be the death of her. 'Tis his habit to murder women, you know. Besides, I detest these Guises, and that amuses me, to amuse myself at the expense of one of them. Well ! I tell you, I repeat it to you, I have sometimes contradictions, quarrels, but I shall not become as gloomy as a monk on that account; I shall not weep. I continue to laugh, if not always, at least sometimes. Come, tell me who you love, Henri; is your mistress handsome, at any rate ?'

'Alas, my brother, she is not my mistress ?'

'Is she handsome ?'

'Too handsome.'

'Her name ?'

'I do not know it.'

'Come now.'

'On my honour !'

'My friend, I begin to think it is more dangerous than I supposed. It is not gloominess, by the pope ! it is madness.'

'She has spoken to me but once, or rather she has spoken but once in my presence, and, since then, I have not even heard the sound of her voice.'

'And you have not taken the trouble to inform yourself.'

'Of whom ?'

'How, of whom ? of the neighbours.'

'She resides in a house by herself, and no one knows her.'

'Ah, is she a spirit then ?'

'She is a woman, tall and handsome as a sylph, serious and grave as the angel Gabriel.'

'How did you know her ? where did you meet her ?'

'One day I was following a young girl, at the crossway of the Gypécienne, I entered a little garden which adjoins the church, there is a bench there under the trees. Have you ever entered this garden, my brother ?'

'Never, but no matter, continue; there is a bench there under the trees, well ?'

'The shades of evening were thickening, I lost sight of the young girl, and, in seeking her, I arrived at this bench.'

'Go on, go on, I am listening.'

'I had observed the garment of a female upon it; I stretched out my hand,—

“‘Pardon, sir,” said the voice of a man to me suddenly, whom I had not remarked.

'And the hand of this man gently but firmly removed me.'

'He dared to touch you, Joyeuse ?'

'Listen ! the man had his face concealed by a sort of frock, I took him for a monk; besides, he imposed upon me by the affectionate and polite tone of his excuses, for at the same time that he spoke, he indicated to me with his finger, at a distance of ten paces, the female whose white garment had attracted me there, and who had knelt before this stone bench as if it had been an altar.

'I stood still, my brother; it was about the commencement of September that this adventure happened to me; the atmosphere was balmy; the violets and roses, which the faithful have planted over the tombs of the buried, sent me their delicate perfumes; the moon was speeding her way through a dense cloud behind the steeple of the church, and its windows were admitting the silvery light through their tops, whilst at their lower ends they appeared gilded from the reflection of the lighted tapers. My friend, whether it were the majesty of the place, or personal dignity, the kneeling female was to me resplendent in the darkness, like a statue of marble, and as if she were really marble. She impressed me with I know not what respect, which made my heart turn cold.

'I regarded her anxiously.

'She leant over the bench, encircled it with her two arms, glued her lips to it, and I directly saw her shoulders undulate under the efforts of her sighs and her sobs; never have you heard such accents, my brother; never did the pointed steel so grievously pierce the heart!

'Whilst weeping, she kissed the bench with an ardour that destroyed me; her tears moved me, her kisses drove me mad.'

'But it was she, by the Pope! who was mad,' said Joyeuse; 'do they kiss a stone in this manner, do they sigh like this, for nothing?'

'Oh! it was a heavy grief that made her sob, it was a profound love that made her kiss the bench. But whom did she love? for whom did she weep? for whom did she pray? I know not.'

'But this man, did you not question him?'

'I did.'

'And what did he reply?'

'That she had lost her husband.'

'Do they weep for a husband in this fashion?' said Joyeuse; 'a handsome reply, pardieu! and you were satisfied with it?'

'I was compelled to be so, as he would give me no other.'

'But what is the man himself?'

'A sort of domestic, who lives with her.'

'His name?'

'He refused to give it me.'

'Young?—old?'

'He might be about twenty-eight or thirty years of age.'

'Well, what followed?—she did not remain the whole night praying and weeping, I suppose?'

'No; when she had finished weeping—that is, when she had exhausted her tears, when she had worn out her lips on the bench—she rose, my brother. There was about this female such a mystery of sadness, that instead of advancing towards her, as I would have done to any other woman, I drew back; it was she who then came to me, or rather towards me, for she did not even see me; a ray of moonlight now fell upon her countenance, and her face appeared to me illuminated, splendid; it had resumed its sullen severity; no more contractions, no more trembling, no more tears; only the moistened furrow they had

traced. Her eyes alone still sparkled. Her mouth opened gently, to breathe the life which, but a moment previously, had seemed ready to abandon her; she took a few steps in a wearied manner, and like one who walked in her sleep; the man now ran to her and guided her, for she seemed to have forgotten that she trod on earth. Oh ! my brother, what a frightful beauty ! what superhuman strength ! I have seen nothing on earth that resembled her ; sometimes only in my dreams, when heaven opened, there descended visions similar to this reality.'

'Go on, go on, Henri,' said Anne, taking, in spite of himself, an interest in this recital, which at first he had pretended to laugh at.

'Oh ! it is soon finished, my brother; her domestic said a few words to her in a low tone, and she then drew down her veil; no doubt he told her I was there, but she did not even look towards me; she pulled down her veil, and I saw her no longer, my brother; it seemed to me as if the sky became obscured, and that it was no longer a living creature, but a spectre escaped from the tomb, which, among the long grass, glided silently before me.

'She quitted the enclosure; I followed her.

'From time to time, the man turned round and might have seen me, for I did not conceal myself, amazed as I was. What would you have ? I had still the old vulgar ideas in my mind,—the old leaven of mortals in my heart.'

'What do you mean, Henri ?' said Anne, 'I do not understand.'

The young man smiled.

'I mean, my brother,' he said, 'that my youth has been gay, that I have often thought I loved, and that all women were to me, up to this moment, women to whom I could offer my love.'

'Oh ! oh ! what is this one then ?' exclaimed Joyeuse, attempting to resume his gaiety, somewhat changed, despite himself, by the confidence of his brother. 'Take care, Henri, you are raving; this one is not a woman of flesh and bone then, eh ?'

'My brother,' said the young man, grasping the hand of Joyeuse in a feverish manner, 'my brother,' he said, so low that his breath scarcely reached his companion, 'as true as that God hears me, I know not if she is a creature of this world.'

'By the pope,' he replied, 'you will frighten me, if a Joyeuse can ever fear.'

Then attempting to resume his gaiety,—

'But still,' he said, 'she walks, she weeps, and she kisses well; you have yourself told me so; and this seems to me a tolerably good augury, dear friend; but it is not enough; come, what afterwards?'

'But little; I followed her, she did not attempt to conceal herself from me, to change her road, or to take a false one; she did not even appear to think of it.'

'Well! where does she reside?'

'Near the Bastille, in the Rue de Lesdiguières; at her door her companion turned round and saw me.'

'You then made him some sign to intimate that you wished to speak with him?'

'I dared not; 'tis ridiculous what I am telling you, but the servitor imposed upon me almost equal to the mistress.'

'Never mind, you entered the house?'

'No, my brother.'

'On my word, Henri, I have a great mind to disown you for a Joyeuse; but at all events you returned the next morning?'

'Yes, but in vain; in vain to the Gypécienne, in vain to the Rue de Lesdiguières.'

'She had disappeared?'

'Like a shadow that had vanished.'

'But at least you made inquiries?'

'The street has but few inhabitants, no one could satisfy me; I watched for the man, to question him; he returned no more than the female; however, a light which I saw burning in the evening, through the blinds, consoled me by indicating that she was still there. I tried a thousand ways to enter her house; letters, messages, flowers, presents, everything failed. One evening the light disappeared in its turn, and was not again seen; the lady, wearied no doubt with my importunities, had quitted the Rue de Lesdiguières; no one knew her present abode.'

'But you have found her again, this wild beauty?'

'Chance permitted me. I am unjust, my brother; it was Providence. Listen, for really it is strange. I was passing the Rue de Bussy a fortnight ago, at midnight. You know, my brother, that the instructions as to fire are

severely carried out; well, I not only saw fire at the windows of a house, but also raging fire devouring the second floor.

'I knocked loudly at the door, a man appeared at the window.

"Your house is on fire!" I cried to him.

"Silence, for pity's sake," he said to me, "silence, I am endeavouring to extinguish it."

"Do you wish me to call the watch?"

"No, no! in Heaven's name, call no one!"

"But yet, if they could assist you?"

"Will you? if so, come, and you will render me a service, for which I will be grateful the rest of my life."

"And how would you have me get in?"

"Here is the key of the door."

And he threw me a key from the window.

'I rapidly mounted the staircase, and entered the room in which the fire was raging.

'It was the floor that had taken fire; I was in the laboratory of a chemist. In making some experiment, an inflammable liquor was spilled on the floor, thus the fire.

'When I entered, he was already master of the fire, so that I had leisure to regard him.

'He was a man about twenty-eight or thirty years of age, at least he appeared to me so; a frightful cicatrice furrowed his cheek, another traversed his skull, his bushy beard concealed the remainder of his face.

"I thank you, sir, but you see the fire is now extinguished; if you are as gallant a man as you appear, have the kindness to retire, for my mistress may enter every moment, and she will be angry at seeing, at this hour, a stranger in my house, or rather in her house."

'The sound of this voice rendered me nearly motionless. I opened my mouth to say to him, "You are the man of the Cypécienne, the man of the Rue de Lesdiguières, the man of the unknown female,"—for you remember that he was covered with a frock, that I had never seen his face, that I had only heard his voice. I was about to tell him this, to question him, to supplicate him, when the door suddenly opened, and a woman entered.

"What's the matter, then, Remy?" she demanded, arresting herself majestically on the step of the door "and why this noise?"

‘Oh, my brother, it was she, still handsomer by the dying flames of the fire, than by the pale light of the moon; it was she, it was the woman whose constant image was gnawing at my heart.

‘At the exclamation I uttered, the domestic regarded me more attentively.

‘“Thank you, sir,” he said again, “thank you; but you see the fire is out. Leave, I entreat you, leave.”

‘“My friend,” I said, “you dismiss me rather abruptly.”

‘“Madame,” said the domestic, “’tis him.”

‘“Him, who?” she inquired.

‘“The young cavalier we encountered in the garden of the Gypécienne, who followed us to the Rue de Lesdiguières.”

‘She then fixed her eyes on me, and by this look I felt assured that she saw me for the first time.

‘“Sir,” she said, “for mercy’s sake, retire!”

‘I hesitated, I wished to speak, to supplicate, but my lips refused the words; I remained motionless and dumb, occupied in contemplating her.

‘“Take care, sir,” said the servitor, with more bitterness than severity, “take care, you will force madame to fly a second time.”

‘“Oh! I hope not!” I replied, bowing; “but, madame, I will not offend you.”

‘She did not reply to me. As insensible, as mute, as frozen, as if she had not heard me, she turned round, and I saw her disappear gradually in the shade, descending the steps of a staircase, on which her footstep no more resounded than the step of a spirit.’

‘And there was an end of her?’ inquired Joyeuse.

‘Just so. The domestic conducted me to the door, saying to me,—

‘“Forget, sir, in the name of Jesus and the Virgin Mary, I entreat you, forget.”

‘I fled, dismayed, wild, stupid, pressing my head between my two hands, and asking myself if I were not mad.

‘Since then, I go every evening to this street; you see therefore why, on leaving the Hotel de Ville, I directed my steps this way; every evening, I said, I come to this street, I conceal myself at the corner of a house which is opposite hers, under a small balcony which completely hides me; once out of ten, perhaps, I see a light in the

room she inhabits. There is my life, there is my happiness.'

'What happiness !' exclaimed Joyeuse.

'Alas ! I lose it if I wish for any other.'

'But if you lose yourself with this resignation ?'

'My brother,' said Henri, with a melancholy smile, 'what would you have ? I am happy thus.'

'Tis impossible.'

'What do you mean ? Happiness is relative; I know that she is there; I see her through the wall, or rather, I seem to see her. If she quitted this house, if I passed another fortnight as I did when I lost her, my brother, I should go mad, or become a monk.'

'Not so, mordieu ! there are already enough of madmen and monks in the family; let it rest there now, my dear friend.'

'No observations, Anne, no raillery; observations are useless, raillery will do nothing.'

'And who speaks to you of observations or of raillery ?'

'Very well. But——'

'Allow me to tell you one thing only.'

'What ?'

'That you have allowed yourself to be caught like an arrant schoolboy.'

'I made neither calculations nor combinations; I was not caught, I abandoned myself to something stronger than myself. When a current drives you, it is better to follow the current than to struggle against it.'

'And if it carries you to an abyss.'

'We must be engulfed in it, my brother.'

'That is your opinion ?'

'Yes.'

'It is not mine, and in your place——'

'What would you have done, Anne ?'

'Enough, most certainly, to know her name, her age; in your place——'

'Anne, Anne, you did not know her.'

'No, but I know you. How, Henri, you had 50,000 crowns which I gave you from the 100,000 given me as a present by the King on his birthday.'

'They are still in my chest, Anne; not one is missing.'

'Mordieu ! so much the worse. If they were not in your chest, the woman would be in your alcove.'

'Oh ! my brother.'

'There is no "Oh !" in the matter ! Henri, an ordinary domestic is bought for ten crowns, a good one for a hundred, an excellent one for a thousand, a marvellous one for three thousand. Now let us see. Let us suppose the phoenix of domestics, let us imagine the god of fidelity, and by means of 20,000 crowns, by the pope ! he would be your own; there would then remain to you 130,000 francs, wherewith to purchase the phoenix of women, sold by the phoenix of servitors. Henri, my friend, you are a simpleton.'

'Anne,' said Henri, sighing, 'there are individuals who are not to be bought; there are hearts, which the riches of a kingdom cannot purchase.'

Joyeuse pondered.

'Well ! I admit it,' he said; 'but there are none who do not yield themselves.'

'Be it so.'

'Well ! what have you done, that the heart of this unfeeling beauty should be delivered over to you ?'

'I have the conviction, Anne, of having done everything I could do.'

'Now, really, Comte du Bouchage, you are mad; you see a woman, sad, solitary, and sighing, and you make yourself more sad, more solitary, more sighing, that is, more wearisome than herself ! In truth, you spoke in a strange fashion about love, and you are as outlandish as an alderman of a ward. She is lonely, give her a companion; she is melancholy, be you gay; she grieves, console her, and replace her loss.'

'Impossible, my brother.'

'Have you tried ?'

'What is the use ?'

'You are amorous, you say ?'

'I do not know words by which I can express my love.'

'Well ! in a fortnight you shall possess your mistress.'

'My brother !'

'On the faith of a Joyeuse. You have not despaired, I hope ?'

'No, for I have never hoped.'

'At what hour do you see her ?'

'At what hour do I see her ?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'But I have told you, brother, that I have not seen her.'

'Not even at her window ?'

'Not even her shadow, I tell you.'

'This must end. Come, has she a lover ?'

'I have never seen a man enter her house, except Remy, whom I mentioned to you.'

'How stands the house ?'

'Two floors, a small door on a step, a terrace above the second window.'

'But could we not enter by this terrace ?'

'It is so isolated from the other houses.'

'And what is there opposite to it ?'

'Another house, almost similar, although apparently more elevated.'

'By whom is this house inhabited ?'

'By a sort of bourgeois.'

'Of a good or bad disposition ?'

'Of a good humour, for at times I have heard him laugh by himself.'

'Purchase his house of him.'

'How do you know it is for sale ?'

'Offer him double what it is worth.'

'And if the lady sees me ?'

'Well ?'

'She will disappear again, whilst by concealing my presence, I hope some day or other to see her again.'

'You shall see her to-night.'

'I ?'

'Encamp under her balcony at eight o'clock.'

'I shall be there, as I am every day, but without better hope than hitherto.'

'A propos ! the proper address ?'

'Between the gate Bussy, and the hotel Saint Denis, near the corner of the Rue des Augustins, at twenty paces from a large hostelry with the sign—*The Sword of the Proud Chevalier*.'

'Very well, at eight o'clock this evening.'

'But what will you do ?'

'You will see, you will hear. In the meantime, return home, put on your gayest dress, take your richest jewels, moisten your hair with the finest essences; to-night you shall enter the place.'

'May Providence hear you, my brother.'

'Henri, when Providence is deaf, the devil is not so. I quit you, my mistress awaits me; no, I mean the mistress

of M. de Mayenne. By the pope! she, at least, is no prude.'

'Brother!'

'Pardon, my handsome love page; I make no comparison between these two ladies, be quite persuaded of that; although from what you tell me, I like mine the best, or rather, ours! But she is waiting for me, and I would not keep her in suspense. Adieu, Henri; to-night!'

'To-night, Anne.'

The two brothers shook hands and separated.

The one, in about two hundred paces, boldly lifted and let fall the knocker of a handsome Gothic house in the square of Notre-Dame.

The other dived silently into one of the tortuous streets which adjoins the Palais.

CHAPTER VII

IN WHICH THE SWORD OF THE PROUD CHEVALIER
PREVAILED OVER THE ROSE-TREE OF LOVE

DURING the conversation we have reported, the night had approached, enveloping in its humid mantle of fog the town, which two hours previously had been so brilliant.

Besides, Salcède dead, the spectators had thought of regaining their garrets; and there was nothing seen but some scattered groups in the streets, instead of that uninterrupted chain of sightseers which, during the day, had assembled together at the same point.

Even at the most distant quarters might be noticed the remains of the earthquake, easily understood after the long agitation of the centre.

Thus, near the gate Bussy, for example, where we must at this moment transport ourselves, to follow some of the personages we have introduced at the commencement of this history, and to make acquaintance with some fresh individuals; at this extremity, we say, might be heard the buzzing, as of a bee-hive at the setting of the sun, of a certain house painted rose colour, and relieved by blue and white colours, which was called, the house of The Sword of the Proud Chevalier, but which in fact was

nothing more than an hostelry of gigantic proportions, recently installed in this neighbourhood.

At this period Paris did not reckon a single good hostelry, which had not its triumphant sign. The Sword of the Proud Chevalier was one of these magnificent exhibitions, destined to please all tastes, and include all sympathies.

On the entablature was painted the combat of an archangel, or a saint, against a dragon, launching, like the monster of Hippolytus, torrents of flame and smoke. The painter, animated with a sentiment both heroic and pious, had placed in the hands of the proud knight, armed at all points, not a sword, but an immense cross, with which he cut in two, more skilfully than with the sharpest blade, the unfortunate dragon, whose fragments lay bleeding on the ground.

At the bottom of the sign, or rather of the picture, for most certainly it merited this appellation, might be seen quantities of spectators lifting their hands in the air; whilst in heaven, angels covered with laurels and palms the helmet of the 'Proud Chevalier.'

In addition, the artist, anxious to prove that he painted all sorts, had grouped together grapes, pumpkins, beetles, lizards, a snail on a rose; lastly, two rabbits, one white, the other gray, which in spite of the difference in colour, which might have indicated a difference of opinion, were both scratching their noses, rejoicing, probably, at the memorable victory gained by the proud chevalier over the parabolic dragon, which was no other than Satan.

Assuredly, either the proprietor of the sign was of a very difficult character, or he must have been well satisfied with the conscience of the artist. In fact, the painter had not lost a line in space, and if it had been necessary to add a worm to the picture, there would have been no room for it. It did not result from this handsome sign that the cabaret was filled as it ought to have done; on the contrary, for reasons we shall presently explain, and which our readers will understand, there were, we do not say even sometimes, but nearly always, empty benches at the hostelry of the Proud Chevalier.

And yet the house was large and comfortable; built squarely, fixed to the ground by a solid foundation, it stretched out superbly; above its sign four small towers, each containing its octagon chamber; the whole built,

it is true, with the rough ends of trees, but coquettish and mysterious, as every house ought to be that is anxious to please men, and especially women. But there lay the evil—we cannot please every one.

Such, however, was not the conviction of Dame Fournichon, hostess of the Proud Chevalier. In consequence of this non-conviction, she engaged her husband to quit a bathing-house in which they vegetated, at the Rue Saint Honoré, to turn the spit and broach the wine for the profit of the lovers of the Bussy crossing, and even of other quarters of Paris. Unfortunately, for the expectations of Dame Fournichon, her hostelry was situate not far distant from the Pre-aux-clercs, so that there arrived, attracted both by its proximity and sign, to the Proud Chevalier, so many prepared to fight, that the other couples, less warlike, fled from the poor hostelry as from a plague, from the fear of noise and tumult. The amorous are a peaceable set, who love not to be disturbed, so that in these little towers so gallant, were lodged none but weather-beaten soldiers.

Thus Dame Fournichon pretended, and not without reason, we must admit, that the sign had brought ill luck to the house, and she affirmed, that had they listened to her experience, and painted over the door, instead of the Proud Chevalier, and the hideous dragon, which frightened away every one, something gallant, as for example, the *Rose-tree of Love*, with hearts inflamed instead of roses, every tender mind would have chosen her hostelry as a domicile.

Unfortunately, Maitre Fournichon, unwilling to avow that he repented of his idea, and of the influence this idea had had over the sign, paid no attention to the observations of his housekeeper, and replied, shrugging his shoulders, that, as an old standard-bearer of M. Danville, he ought naturally to look for customers amongst the veterans of war; he added that a trooper who has nothing to think of but to drink, swallows as much as three pairs of lovers, and should he only pay but half the reckoning, there would still be a profit, since the amorous, the most prodigal, never pay like the troopers.

Besides, said he, wine is more moral than love.

At these words Dame Fournichon in her turn shrugged her plump shoulders, in a way that we might malignantly interpret her ideas in matters of morality.

Things were in this state of schism in the establishment of the Fournichons, and the couple vegetated at the gate Bussy, as they had vegetated at the Rue Saint Honoré, when an unexpected circumstance arrived to change the face of things, and brought a triumph to the opinions of Maitre Fournichon, to the great glory of the worthy sign in which every kingdom in nature had its representative.

A month previous to the execution of Salcède, at the conclusion of some military exercises which had taken place in the Pre-aux-clerics, Dame Fournichon and her husband were installed, in accordance with their habit, each in an angular tower of their establishment, idle, pondering, and cold, because all the tables and all the chambers of the hostelry of the Proud Chevalier were completely empty.

The couple, therefore, were looking wistfully over the plain, from which were disappearing (as they embark in the ferry-boat of the Tour de Nesle, to return to the Louvre) the soldiers which a captain had just been manœuvring; and whilst regarding and groaning against the military despotism, which forced the bodyguard of soldiers to return, although naturally so thirsty, they saw the captain put his horse into a trot, and advance, with a single orderly, in the direction of the gate Bussy.

The officer all plumed, proud upon his white horse, and upon whose gilt sword-sheath rested a handsome cloak of Flemish cloth, was in ten minutes opposite the hostelry.

But as it was not to the hostelry he journeyed, he was passing by it, without even having remarked the sign, for he appeared gloomy and pre-occupied, when Maitre Fournichon, whose heart sickened at the idea of not having a customer the whole day, leaned outside the tower, saying,—

‘Look, then, wife, what a handsome horse.’

To which Madame Fournichon, seizing the reply as a complaisant hostess, added, ‘And the handsome cavalier, then!’

The captain, who did not seem insensible to flattery from wherever it came, raised his head, as though suddenly awoke. He saw the host, hostess, and hostelry, pulled up his horse, and called his orderly; and, still in the saddle, he regarded attentively the house and the quarter.

Fournichon had tumbled down the staircase, four steps

at a time, and stood at the door, his cap rolled up in his two hands.

The captain, having reflected some moments, dismounted from his horse.

'Is there no one here?' he demanded.

'No one at the present moment, sir,' replied the host humbly.

And he added,—

'Tis not, however, usual at the house.'

But Dame Fournichon, like almost all women, was more sagacious than her husband, and in consequence, she cried hastily, from the top of her window,—

'If monsieur seeks solitude, he will be perfectly at home here.'

The cavalier raised his head, and seeing the honest figure, after hearing the frank reply, he answered,—

'For the moment, yes; 'tis exactly what I am seeking my good woman.'

Dame Fournichon immediately descended to meet the traveller, saying,—

'This time 'tis the Rose-tree of Love that handsels, and not the Sword of the Proud Chevalier.'

The captain, who at this hour attracted the attention of the worthy couple, and who also merits that of the reader, was a man from thirty to thirty-five years of age, who seemed, however, not more than eight-and-twenty, so careful had he been of his person. He was tall, well-made, with an expressive and fine physiognomy; on examination, perhaps some little affectation might be noticed in his noble manners, but, affected or not, his manners were noble.

He gave to his companion the bridle of a magnificent horse, which pawed the ground; and said to him,—

'Wait for me here, and walk the horses about.'

The soldier received the bridle and obeyed.

When inside the vast hall of the hostelry, he stopped, and casting a look of satisfaction round him,—

'Oh! oh! such a grand hall, and not a single drinker! very good!'

Maitre Fournichon regarded him with astonishment, whilst madame smiled to him intelligibly.

'But,' continued the captain, 'there is something in your conduct or your house, which keeps the customers away from you?'

'Neither one nor the other, sir, thank God,' replied Madame Fournichon, 'but the quarter is new, and as to the customers, we take our choice.'

'Ah! very well,' said the captain.

Maitre Fournichon, during this time, condescended to approve, by a nod of his head, the replies of his wife.

'For example,' she added, with a certain wink of the eye which revealed the author of the *Rose-tree of Love*, 'for instance, for a customer like your lordship, we would willingly forgo a dozen.'

'Tis polite, my pretty hostess. Thank you.'

'Will monsieur taste some wine?' said Fournichon, in his least rank voice.

'Will monsieur visit the rooms?' said Madame Fournichon, in her softest tone.

'Both, if you please,' replied the captain.

Fournichon descended to the cellar, whilst his wife indicated to her guest the stairs leading to the towers, upon which, tucking up her coquettish petticoat, she already preceded him, making to creak at ever step a veritable Parisian slipper.

'How many persons can you lodge here?' inquired the captain on arriving at the first floor.

'Thirty persons, of whom ten may be masters.'

'Tis not enough, my belle,' replied the captain.

'Why so, sir?'

'I had a project, let us say no more about it.'

'Ah! sir, you will certainly not find a better than the hostelry of the *Rose-tree of Love*.'

'How the *Rose-tree of Love*?'

'Of the *Proud Chevalier*, I mean, and unless having the *Louvre* and its dependences—'

The stranger fixed a singular look upon her.

'You are right,' said he, 'and unless having the *Louvre*—' And then aside: 'Why not?' he continued, 'it will be more convenient, and not so expensive. You say then, my good dame, he said aloud, 'that you can receive in your house here thirty persons?'

'Yes, without doubt.'

'But for a day?'

'Oh! for a day, forty, and even forty-five.'

'Forty-five? by Saint George! 'tis just my number.'

'Really; then see how lucky it is.'

'And that without causing slander out of doors?'

'Sometimes on a Sunday, we have eighty soldiers here.'

'And no crowd before the house, no spies amongst your neighbours?'

'Oh ! mon Dieu ! no; as for neighbours we have only a worthy bourgeois, who meddles with the affairs of no one; and a lady who lives so retired, that for three weeks she has inhabited the quarter, I have not yet seen her; all the rest are small fry.'

'This then suits me to a marvel.'

'Oh ! so much the better,' said Madame Fournichon.

'And a month from to-day, madame,' continued the captain, 'retain this, a month from to-day.'

'The 26th of October then?'

'Precisely the 26th of October.'

'Well?'

'Well ! on the 26th of October I will rent your hostelry.'

'The whole of it.'

'Entirely, I wish to give a surprise to a few compatriots, officers, at least for the most part, gentry of the sword, who come to Paris to seek their fortune; between this and then, they will have received notice to dismount at your house.'

'And how will they have received this advice, if it is a surprise you intend them?' imprudently observed Madame Fournichon.

'Ah !' replied the captain, visibly annoyed by the question; 'ah ! if you are curious or indiscreet—Parfandious !'

'No, no, sir,' quickly replied Madame Fournichon, frightened.

Fournichon had heard; at the words, officers or men of the sword, his heart beat at ease. He ran.

'Sir,' he exclaimed, 'you shall be the master here, the despot of the house, and without question. Mon Dieu ! all your friends shall be welcome.'

'I did not say my friends, but my countrymen, my honest man,' said the captain haughtily.

'Yes, yes, the countrymen of the seigniory; 'tis I who am wrong.'

Dame Fournichon turned her back in dudgeon; the roses of love had changed themselves into piles of halberds.

'You will give them supper,' continued the captain.

'Very well.'

'You can let them sleep, if necessary, in case I have not prepared lodgings for them.'

'Certainly.'

'In a word, you will place yourself at their entire discretion, without any questions.'

'Tis understood.'

'Here are thirty livres, as earnest money.'

'Tis a bargain, monseigneur; your countrymen shall be treated like kings, and if you would like to assure yourself by tasting the wine——'

'I never drink, thank you.'

The captain approached the window, and called the guardian of the horses.

Maitre Fournichon in the meantime had made a reflection,—

'Monseigneur,' said he (since the receipt of the three pistoles so generously paid in advance, Maitre Fournichon called the stranger monseigneur,) 'Monseigneur, how shall I recognise these gentlemen?'

'It's true, parfandious! I forgot; give me some wax, paper, and a light.'

Dame Fournichon brought it all.

The captain impressed upon the boiling wax, the bezel of a ring which he wore on his left hand.

'There,' said he, 'you see that figure?'

'A handsome woman, my faith.'

'Yes, 'tis a Cleopatra; well, each of my countrymen will bring you a similar impression; you will therefore lodge the bearer of this impression. 'Tis understood, is it not?'

'For how long?'

'I do not yet know; you shall receive my orders on this subject.'

'We will await them.'

The handsome cavalier descended the staircase, mounted his horse, and departed at a smart trot.

Waiting his return, the host and his wife pocketed their thirty livres, to the great joy of the former, who did not cease repeating,—

'Gentry of the sword! come, decidedly the sign is not wrong, and 'tis by the sword we shall make our fortune.'

And he commenced polishing his saucepans for the expected 26th of October.

CHAPTER VIII

A MEETING OF GASCONS

To say that Dame Fournichon was absolutely as discreet as the stranger had imagined her, is more than we are bold enough to say. Besides, she thought herself, no doubt, released from any obligation to him, by the advantage he had given to Maitre Fournichon as to the Sword of the Proud Chevalier, but as there still remained to her more to guess than she had been told, she began, in order to establish her suppositions on a solid basis, by endeavouring to discover who was the unknown cavalier, who paid so generously for the hospitality of his countrymen. So that she did not fail to question the first soldier she saw pass, as to the name of the captain who had reviewed the soldiers.

The soldier, who was probably a more discreet character than his interrogator, first inquired of her, before replying, for what purpose she asked the question.

'Because he has been here,' replied Madame Fournichon; 'he has conversed with us, and we always like to know with whom we speak.'

The soldier began to laugh.

'The captain who commanded the review, would not have entered the Sword of the Proud Chevalier, Madame Fournichon,' he said.

'And why so?' demanded the hostess; 'is he too grand a seigneur for that?'

'Perhaps.'

'Well! if I told you it was not for himself that he entered the hostelry of the Proud Chevalier?'

'And for whom then?'

'For his friends.'

'The captain who commanded the review will not lodge his friends at the Proud Chevalier, I'll answer for it.'

'Plague! how you go on, my honest man! And who then is this monsieur, who is too grand a seigneur to lodge his friends in the best hotel in Paris?'

'You mean to speak of the captain who commanded the review, do you not?'

'Without doubt.'

'Well, my good woman, he who commanded the

review, is purely and simply M. the Duke Nogaret de la Valette d'Epéron, peer of France, colonel-general of the infantry of the King, and rather more a king than His Majesty himself. Well! what do you say to that ?

'That if it was he who came, he has done me honour.'

'Did you hear him say, "parfandious ?"'

'Eh! eh!' said Dame Fournichon, who had seen many extraordinary things in her lifetime, and to whom the word parfandious was not altogether unknown.

We may now judge whether the 26th of October was looked for with impatience.

On the 25th, in the evening, a man entered, carrying a bag somewhat heavy, which he placed on the buffet of the Fournichons.

'Tis the price of the repast ordered for to-morrow,' he said.

'At how much a head ?' demanded the host and hostess together.

'Six livres.'

'Won't the countrymen of the captain, then, make but one repast here ?'

'Only one.'

'The captain has found a lodging for them then ?'

'It seems so.'

And the messenger left, in spite of the questions of the Rose-tree and the Sword, without deigning to reply to any of them.

At length the much-wished-for day rose upon the kitchens of the Proud Chevalier.

Half-past twelve struck at the Augustins, when two cavaliers drew up at the door of the hostelry, dismounted from their horses, and entered.

These came from the gate Bussy, and naturally found themselves the first arrived; first, because they had horses; and next, because the hostelry of the Sword was scarcely a hundred paces from the gate Bussy.

One of them, indeed, who appeared the chief, as much by his handsome appearance as his magnificence, brought two servants with him well mounted.

Each of them exhibited his seal with the image of Cleopatra, and was received by the host with every sort of ceremony, especially the young man with the servants.

With the exception however of the latter, the new arrivals installed themselves with a timidity and a certain

uneasiness; it was apparent that something important preoccupied them, especially when they mechanically carried their hands to their pockets.

Some asked to repose themselves, others to run into the town before supper; the young man with the two servants inquired if there was nothing new to see in Paris.

'My faith,' said Dame Fournichon, sensible of the good looks of the cavalier, 'if you do not mind the crowd, and have no objection to remain on your legs for four hours at a stretch, you can amuse yourself by going to see M. de Salcède, a Spaniard, who has conspired.'

'Ah!' said the young man, 'it's true, I have heard this affair spoken of; I will go there.'

And he left with the two servants.

About two o'clock, arrived, in groups of four or five, fifteen fresh travellers.

Some of them arrived alone. There was one who entered like a neighbour, without a hat, and a switch in his hand; he swore against Paris, where the thieves were so audacious that his hat had been taken from him near the Grève, in getting through a group, and so expertly that he had never been enabled to detect the thief. For the rest, 'twas his own fault, he ought not to have entered Paris, with a hat ornamented with so magnificent an agraffe.

Towards four o'clock, there were already forty compatriots of the captain installed in the hostelry of the Fournichons.

'Is it not strange?' said the host to his wife, 'they are all Gascons?'

'What do you see strange in that?' replied the dame; 'did not the captain say they were his countrymen he received?'

'Well?'

'Since he is a Gascon himself, his countrymen ought to be Gascons.'

'Ah! it's true,' said the host.

'Is not M. d'Epéron from Toulouse?'

'It's true, it's true! You still hold that it is M. d'Epéron then?'

'Did he not three times drop the famous "parfandious"?'

'He dropped the famous parfandious?' said Fournichon uneasy; 'what is this animal?'

'Imbecile ! 'tis his favourite oath.'

'Ah ! true.'

'Do not be surprised therefore, but at one thing, which is, that you have but forty Gascons, whereas you ought to have forty-five.'

But about five o'clock, the five other Gascons arrived, and the guests of the Sword found their number complete.

Never had such a surprise lengthened the visages of the Gascons. For an hour, at least, there was nothing but 'Des sandioux ! des mordioux ! des Cap de Bious !' transports of joy so noisy, that it seemed to the Four-nichons that all Saintonge, all Poitou, the whole of Aunis, and all Languedoc, had made an incursion into their vast saloon.

Some were known to each other : thus Eustache de Miradoux embraced the cavalier with the two servants, and presented him to Lardille, Militor, and Scipio.

'And by what chance are you in Paris ?' demanded the cavalier.

'But yourself, my dear Saint Maline ?'

'I have an appointment in the army. And you ?'

'I am come about an affair of succession.'

'Ah ! ah ! you still drag after the old Lardille ?'

'She would follow me.'

'Could you not depart secretly, instead of encumbering yourself with the lot she has harnessed to her petticoats ?'

'Impossible ; 'tis she who opened the lawyer's letter.'

'Ah ! you have received the news of this succession, by a letter ?' said Saint Maline.

'Yes,' replied Miradoux.

And hastening to change the conversation,—

'Is it not singular that the hostelry should be so full, and full of countrymen even ?'

'No, it is not singular; the sign is alluring for men of honour,' interrupted our old friend Perducas de Pincornay, mixing in the conversation.

'Ah, ah ! 'tis you, comrade,' said Saint Maline; 'you have never explained to me what you were narrating to me at the Place de Grève, when the immense crowd separated us.'

'And what am I to explain to you ?' said Pincornay, reddening a little.

'How between Angouleme and Antwerp, I met you on

the road, as I see you to-day, on foot, a switch in your hand, but without a hat on your head ?'

'This appears strange to you, sir ?'

'My faith, yes,' said Saint Maline; 'it is some distance from hence to Poitiers, and you come from beyond Poitiers.'

'I come from Saint Andre de Cubsac.'

'Only think ! and this without a hat ?'

'Tis very simple.'

'I don't see how.'

'Yes, and you shall comprehend. My father has two magnificent horses, to which he is attached in such a fashion, that he is very likely to disinherit me after the misfortune that has happened to me.'

'And what accident has happened to you ?'

'I was riding one of them, the handsomest, when suddenly the report of an arquebuss resounded within ten steps of me; my horse was frightened, started off, and took the direction of the Dordagne.'

'Into which he rushed ?'

'Completely.'

'With you ?'

'No; luckily I had time to slide to the ground, or I should have been drowned with him.'

'Ah, ah ! the poor brute then is drowned ?'

'Pardious ! you know the Dordagne, half a league in width.'

'And then ?'

'I then resolved not to enter the house again, and to withdraw as far as possible from the paternal anger.'

'But your hat ?'

'Ah, the devil ! My hat had fallen.'

'Like yourself ?'

'I did not fall; I slid to the ground; a Pincornay never falls from his horse, the Pincornays are equestrians from their cradle.'

'Tis well known,' said Saint Maline, 'but your hat ?'

'Ah ! there's my hat.'

'Yes.'

'My hat fell then; I set about looking for it, for it was my only resource, as I had left without money.'

'And how could your hat be a resource to you ?' inquired Saint Maline, determined to drive Pincornay to the end.

'Sandioux! a very grand one! I must tell you that the plume of this hat was fastened by an agraffe in diamonds, which His Majesty Charles the Fifth gave to my grandfather, when, in journeying from Spain to Flanders, he rested at our château.'

'Ah, ah! and you have sold your agraffe, and the hat with it. In that case, my dear friend, you ought to be the richest of us all, and with the money from your agraffe you ought to have bought a second glove; your hands are not alike, one is as white as the hand of a woman, the other is as black as the hand of a negro.'

'Wait then; at the moment I turned round to look for my hat, I saw an enormous raven pounce upon it from above.'

'On your hat?'

'Or rather my diamond. You know that this bird steals anything that sparkles. He pounced on my diamond, then, and stole it from me.'

'Your diamond?'

'Yes, monsieur. At first I followed him with my eyes; afterwards, running, I cried, "Stop, stop thief! plague!" In about five minutes he had disappeared, and not a word have I heard of him since.'

'So that, overcome by this double loss——'

'I did not dare to re-enter the paternal roof, and decided upon coming to Paris, to seek my fortune.'

'Good,' said a third, 'the wind has changed to a raven, then? It seems to me, I heard you narrate to M. de Loignac, that, occupied in reading a letter from your mistress, the wind had carried off both letter and hat; and that, like a veritable Amadis, you ran after the letter, leaving the hat to pursue its own course.'

'Sir,' said Saint Maline, 'I have the honour of knowing M. d'Aubigné, who, although a very brave soldier, knows also how to use his pen; when you meet him, narrate to him the history of your hat, and he will make a famous tale of it.'

Some half-stifled laughter was heard.

'Eh, eh! messieurs,' said the irritable Gascon, 'am I laughed at by chance?'

Every one turned round, to laugh more at his ease.

Perdicas cast an inquiring look round him, and observed, near the chimney, a young man who concealed

his face in his hands; he fancied the latter only acted thus the better to conceal himself.

He went to him.

'Eh, sir,' he said, 'if you laugh, laugh at least openly, that we may see your face.'

And he struck the shoulder of the young man, who looked up with a grave and severe countenance.

The young man was no other than our friend Ernauton de Carmainges, still completely overpowered from his adventure at the Grève.

'I beg you will leave me alone, sir,' he said to him; 'and especially if you touch me again, do so with the hand that has the glove on; you can see that I do not trouble myself about you.'

'Very well,' grumbled Pincornay, 'if you do not trouble yourself about me, I have nothing to say.'

'Ah! sir,' said Eustace de Miradoux to Carmainges, with the most conciliating intentions, 'you are not gracious towards our countryman.'

'And why the devil do you interfere, sir?' said Ernauton, more and more annoyed.

'You are right, sir,' said Miradoux, bowing, 'it is no business of mine.'

And he turned on his heels to rejoin Lardille, seated in a corner of the large chimney; but some one barred his passage. It was Militor, with his two hands in his waistband and his crafty sneer on his lips.

'Come, beau-papa,' said the good-for-nothing.

'Well!'

'What were you saying?'

'About what?'

'Of the fashion in which this gentleman hit your nail.'

'Heim.'

'He knocked you about in a right good fashion.'

'Ah! you remarked that, did you?' said Eustache, attempting to turn Militor.

But the latter hindered the manœuvre, by turning to the left and again facing him.

'Not only myself,' continued Militor, 'but every one else; see how they all laugh round us.'

The fact was that they did laugh, but not more at this than anything else.

Eustache became as red as fire.

'Come, come, beau-papa, don't let the affair get cold,' said Militor.

Eustache drew himself up and approached de Carmaingés.

They pretend, sir,' he said to him, 'that you intended to be particularly disagreeable to me.'

'When so?'

'Just now.'

'And who pretends this?'

'Monsieur,' said Eustache, pointing to Militor.

'Then, monsieur,' replied Carmaingés, dwelling ironically on the qualification. 'in that case *Monsieur* is a coxcomb.'

'Oh! oh!' said Militor, furious.

'And I recommend him,' continued Carmaingés, 'not to peck at me, or otherwise I shall remember the advice of M. de Loignac.'

'M. de Loignac did not say I was a coxcomb, sir.'

'No, he said you were an ass; do you prefer that? it matters little to me: If you are an ass, I will bleed you; if you are a coxcomb, I will pluck you.'

'Sir,' said Eustache, 'tis my son-in-law; treat him more civilly, I beg, out of regard to me.'

'Ah! see how you defend me, beau-papa,' exclaimed Militor, exasperated; 'if this is the way, I will defend myself better alone.'

'To school with these children,' said Ernauton, 'to school!'

'To school!' exclaimed Militor, advancing, his fist raised, towards M. de Carmaingés; 'I am seventeen, do you understand, sir?'

'And I am twenty-five,' said Ernauton; 'and for this reason I shall correct you as you deserve.'

And seizing him by his collar and waistband, he raised him from the ground, as he would a bundle, and threw him from the window of the ground floor into the street, and this whilst Lardille was crying loud enough to crack the walls.

'Now,' added Ernauton quietly, 'of father-in-law, mother-in-law, son-in-law, and all the families to boot, I'll make mince-meat, if I am again disturbed.'

'My faith!' said Miradoux, 'I think he is right. Why excite the gentleman?'

'Oh! coward, coward! who allows his son to be beat!'

exclaimed Lardille, advancing towards Eustache, and clutching his scattered hair.

'There, there, there!' said Eustache, 'quietness; it will do him good, and give him a character.'

'So they throw men out of the window, here,' said an officer, entering; 'the devil! when you get to these sort of jokes, you should at least cry, "Look out, below there."'

'Monsieur de Loignac!' exclaimed twenty voices.

'Monsieur de Loignac!' repeated the forty-five.

At this name, known throughout Gascony, every one rose, and was silent.

CHAPTER IX

MONSIEUR DE LOIGNAC

BEHIND M. de Loignac came Militor, bruised by his fall and bursting with rage.

'Followers, gentlemen,' said Loignac, 'we make a great noise, I think. Ah! ah! Maitre Militor has again played the sullen, as it seems, and his nose suffers for it.'

'They shall pay me my blows,' grumbled Militor, pointing to Carmaignes.

'Serve, Maitre Fournichon,' cried Loignac, 'and let each be civil to his neighbour, if it is possible. It is requisite, from to-day, to love one another like brothers.'

'Hum,' said Saint Maline.

'Charity is scarce,' said Chalabre, spreading his serviette over his iron-gray doublet; so that however abundant might be the sauces, no accident should happen to him.

'And to love each other so tenderly is difficult,' added Ernauton; 'it is true we are not together for long.'

'Look,' said Pincornay, who still had the raiilety of Birau in his heart, I am laughed at because I have no hat, and they say nothing to M. de Monterabeau, who is going to dine with a cuirass of the time of the Emperor Pertinax, from whom, in all probability, he is descended; this is being on the defensive.'

Monterabeau, annoyed, stood up, and in a treble voice,—

'Messieurs,' said he, 'I take it off; a hint to those who would rather see me with arms offensive, than with arm defensive.'

And he majestically unlaced his cuirass, making a sign to his lackey, a graybeard of fifty, to come to him.

'Come! peace peace!' said M. de Loignac, 'and let us place ourselves at table.'

'Rid me of this cuirass, I beg of you,' said Pertinax to his lackey,

The tall fellow took it in his arms.

'And am I not to dine?' he said to him in a low tone. 'Let me be helped to something, Pertinax; I am dying of hunger.'

This interpellation, so strangely familiar, excited no astonishment in the person to whom it was addressed.

'I will do my best,' he said; 'but for a greater certainty, inquire about you.'

'Hem!' said the lackey, in a disagreeable tone, 'that's not very cheering.'

'Have you absolutely nothing remaining?' demanded Pertinax.

'We have eaten our last crown, at Sens.'

'Plague! endeavour to make money of something.'

He had scarcely spoken when a cry was heard in the street, and presently on the step of the hostelry door,—

'Old iron to buy! who'll sell his sword, his old iron?'

'At this cry, Madame Fournichon ran to the door, whilst Fournichon majestically transported the first dishes to the table.

If we may judge from the reception given it, the cuisine of Fournichon was exquisite.

Fournichon, unable to face all the compliments addressed to him, wanted to admit his wife to share them. He looked for her, but in vain; she had disappeared.

He called her.

'What is she doing?' he inquired of a scullion, finding she did not appear.

'Ahl maitre; a golden bargain,' replied the latter. 'She is selling all your old iron for new silver.'

'I hope there is no question about my cuirass, or my battle arms,' exclaimed Fournichon, rushing towards the door.

'No, no,' said Loignac, 'for the purchase of arms is forbidden by an order of the King.'

'Never mind,' said Fournichon, and he ran towards the door.

Madame Fournichon was re-entering triumphant.

'Well ! what's the matter ?' she said, seeing her husband all amazed.

'I have heard you are selling my arms.'

'Well ?'

'I will not have them sold—not I.'

'Bah ! as we are at peace, two new saucepans are well worth an old cuirass.'

'This old-iron trade, however, must be a poor commerce, since the edict of the King, of which M. de Loignac spoke just now,' said Chalabre.

'On the contrary, sir,' said Dame Fournichon 'and for a long time this same merchant has tried we with his offers. My faith ! To-day, I could not resist; and seeing the opportunity, I seized it. Ten crowns, sir, are ten crowns; and an old cuirass is always an old cuirass !'

'How, ten crowns !' said Chalabre; 'as dear as that ? the devil !'

And he became thoughtful.

'Ten crowns !' repeated Pertinax, casting an eloquent look on his lackey; 'do you hear, Monsieur Samuel ?'

Monsieur Samuel was no longer there.

'Ah, ça ! but,' said M. de Loignac, 'this merchant risks his neck, I think.'

'Oh ! he is a very honest man, very gentle, and very straightforward,' said Madame Fournichon.

'But what does he do with all this old iron ?'

'He resells it by weight.'

'By weight !' said Loignac; 'and you say he has given you ten crowns, for what ?'

'For an old cuirass and an old headpiece.'

'Supposing they weigh twenty pounds the two, 'tis half a crown a pound. Parfandious ! as says some one of my acquaintance, this hides some mystery.'

'If I could but catch this honest merchant in my château,' said Chalabre, whose eye sparkled, 'I would sell him three million pounds' weight of head-pieces, arm-pieces, and cuirases.'

'How ! you would sell the arms of your ancestors !' said Saint Maline in a jesting tone.

'Ah, sir !' said Eustache de Miradoux, 'you would be wrong; they are sacred relics.'

'Bah !' said Chalabre; 'at the present moment, my ancestors are relics themselves, and want nothing more but masses.'

The repast was getting warm, thanks to the Burgundy, of which the spices of Fournichon had accelerated the consumption.

The voices rose to a superior diapason, the plates sounded, the brains filled with vapours, through which the Gascons saw everything *couleur de rose*, except Militor.

'See how many men there are enjoying themselves,' said Loignac to his neighbour, who was no other than Ernauton, 'and they know not why.'

'Nor I neither,' replied Carmainges; 'it is true, that for myself I am an exception, and I am not the least in the world joyful.'

'You are wrong, on your own account,' said Loignac; 'for you are of those for whom Paris is a mine of gold, a paradise of honours, a world of happiness!'

Ernauton shook his head.

'Well let us see!'

'Do not jest at me, M. de Loignac,' said Ernauton; 'and you who appear to hold the threads which move the majority of us, do me at least the favour not to treat the Viscount de Carmainges as a wooden actor.'

'I will do you other favours besides this, Monsieur le Vicomte,' said Loignac, bowing politely; 'I distinguished you at the first glance between us; your eye is haughty and gentle; and that other young man yonder, whose eye is dull and crafty.'

'What is his name?'

'Monsieur de Saint Maline.'

'And the cause of his distinction, sir?' if the question is not at the same time too great a curiosity on my part.'

'It is that I know you, nothing more.'

'Me!' said Ernauton, surprised, 'me, you know me?'

'You and him—him—and all who are here.'

'Tis strange!'

'Yes, but 'tis necessary.'

'Why is it necessary?'

'Because a chief should know his soldiers.'

'And that all these men——'

'Will be my soldiers to-morrow.'

'But I thought that M. d'Epernon——'

'Chut! do not pronounce that name here, or rather pronounce no name here, open your ears and shut your mouth; and since I have promised to do you many favours, take this advice as one of them.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Ernauton.

Loignac wiped his moustache, and rising,—

'Messieurs,' said he, 'since chance assembles here forty-five countrymen, let us empty a glass of this Spanish wine to the prosperity of the company.'

This proposition drew forth the loudest applause.

'They are most of them drunk,' said Loignac to Ernauton, 'it would be a good moment to make each relate his history, but we have not the time.'

Then raising his voice,—

'Halloa! Maitre Fournichon,' said he, 'turn out of the room all the women, children, and lackeys.'

Lardille rose up, cursing; she had not finished her dessert.

Militor budged not an inch.

'Did they hear me, below there?' said Loignac, with a glance which admitted of no reply; 'come, come, to the kitchen, Monsieur Militor.'

In a few moments there only remained in the hall the forty-five guests of M. de Loignac.

'Messieurs,' said the latter, 'each of you knows who has brought him to Paris, or at least suspects it. Good! good! never mind his name, you know it, that is sufficient. You know also that you are come to obey him.'

A murmur of assent rose from every part of the hall; only that as each knew alone the affair that concerned him, and was ignorant that his neighbour had come, moved by the same power as himself, they regarded each other with astonishment.

'Tis well,' said Loignac, 'you will regard one another by-and-by, messieurs; be tranquil, you have time to become acquainted. You are come, then, to obey this man; do you acknowledge this?'

'Yes, yes,' cried the forty-five, 'we acknowledge him.'

'Well! to commence,' said Loignac, 'you will leave this hostelry without noise, to inhabit the lodging designed for you.'

'All?' said Saint Maline.

'All!'

'We are all commanded; we are all equal,' said Perducas, whose legs were so unsteady, that, in order to maintain his centre of gravity, he was forced to pass his arm round the neck of Chalabre,

'Take care, then,' said the latter; 'you tumble my doublet.'

'Yes, all equal,' said Loignac, 'before the will of the master.'

'Oh! oh! sir,' said Carmainges, reddening; 'pardon! but I was not told that M. d'Epéron would call himself my master.'

'Wait!'

'This is not what I understood.'

'But wait, then, confound your head!'

There was a deep silence on the part of many, and on the part of others a silence of impatience.

'I have not told you yet who will be your master, messieurs.'

'Yes,' said Saint Maline; 'but you said we should have one.'

'Every one has a master,' said Loignac; 'but if your soul is too proud to rest where you mentioned, seek higher; I will not only not hinder you, but I will authorise you.'

'The King,' murmured Carmainges.

'Silence!' said Loignac; 'you are come here to obey; obey, then. In the interim, here is an order you will do me the pleasure to read aloud, Monsieur Ernauton.'

Ernauton slowly unfolded the parchment handed to him by de Loignac, and read with a loud voice,—

'Order M. de Loignac to take command of the forty-five gentlemen I have sent for to Paris, with the consent of His Majesty

Wagaret de la Valette, Duc d'Epéron.

Drunk or sober, all bowed; there was no inequality except in the equilibrium, when they attempted to rise.

'You have understood me, then,' said M. de Loignac. 'it is requisite you should follow this very moment. Your horses and servants will remain here with Maitre Four-nichon, who will take care of them, and from whom I will have them fetched by-and-by; but for the present, make haste; the boats are waiting.'

'The boats!' repeated the Gascons; 'we are going to embark, then.'

And they exchanged amongst themselves looks full of curiosity.

'Undoubtedly,' said Loignac, 'you are about to embark. To arrive at the Louvre must we not cross the water?'

'To the Louvre, to the Louvre,' murmured the joyful Gascons, 'Cap de Bious ! we are going to the Louvre !'

Loignac quitted the table, made the forty-five pass before him, counting them like sheep, and led them through the streets as far as the Tour de Nesle.

There they found three large barges, each of which took fifteen passengers on board, and immediately cleared from the river.

'What the devil are we going to do at the Louvre ?' asked the most intrepid of themselves, made sober by the cold air of the river, and for the most part very thinly clad.

'If I had my cuirass, at least,' murmured Pertinax Montcrabeau.

CHAPTER X

THE MAN WITH THE CUIRASS

PERTINAX had good reason to regret his absent cuirass, for just at this hour, by the mediation of the singular lackey we have seen speaking so familiarly to his master, he had parted with it for ever.

In fact, at the magic words pronounced by Madame Fournichon—ten crowns—the valet of Pertinax had ran after the merchant.

As it was already dark, and as probably the iron merchant was in a hurry, the latter had already made thirty paces when Samuel left the hotel.

Samuel was therefore obliged to call the iron merchant.

The latter stopped with fear, and threw a piercing glance at the man who was approaching him; but seeing him charged with merchandise, he stopped.

'What do you want, my friend ?' he said to him.

'Eh ! pardieu !' said the lackey, 'what do I want ? to do business with you.'

'Well, then, let us do it quick.'

'You are pressed.'

'Yes.'

'Oh ! you will just give me time to breathe; the devil.'

'Undoubtedly; but breathe quickly; some one waits for me.'

It was evident the merchant had some mistrust as to the errand of the domestic.

'When you have seen what I bring you,' said the latter, 'as you appear to me an amateur, you will take your time.'

'And what do you bring me?'

'A magnificent piece : a work which—but you are not listening to me.'

'No, I am watching.'

'What?'

'You do not know, then, my friend,' said the man of cuirasses, 'that the trade of purchasing and selling arms is forbidden by an edict of the King.'

And he looked round him with suspicion.

The lackey judged it best to appear ignorant.

'I know nothing myself; I am arrived from Mont de Marsan.'

'Ah! that makes a difference,' said the man of the cuirasses, whom this reply seemed to appease; 'but although you arrive from Mont de Marsan,' he continued, 'you already know that I purchase arms.'

'Yes, I know it.'

'And who told you so?'

'Sang dioux! I wanted no one to tell me so, for you cried it loud enough just now.'

'Where?'

'At the door of the hostelry of the Sword of the Proud Chevalier.'

'You were there, then?'

'Yes.'

'With whom?'

'With a heap of friends.'

'With a heap of friends? There is seldom any one of consequence at that hostelry.'

'Then you must have found it much changed.'

'Just so. But whence came all these friends?'

'From Gascony, like myself.'

'Do you belong to the King of Navarre?'

'Come, now, we are French in blood and heart.'

'Yes; but Huguenots.'

'Catholics, like our holy father the pope, thank God,' said Samuel, doffing his cap; 'but it is about the cuirass I wish to talk.'

'Let us approach the wall a little more, if you please; we are too much in sight in the open street.'

And they advanced a few paces towards a comfortable-looking house, at the windows of which no lights were to be seen.

The door of this house was under a sort of awning, forming a balcony. A stone bench ran along the façade, which was its only ornament.

It was both useful and agreeable, for it served as a stepping-stone to the passers-by, by which to mount their horses and mules.

'Let us see this cuirass,' said the merchant, when they had arrived under the awning.'

'Stay.'

'Wait; they are stirring in the house, I think.'

'No, 'tis opposite.'

The merchant turned round.

In fact, opposite, there was a house with two stages, the second of which was at times lighted up as if furtively.

'Let us do it quickly,' said the merchant, feeling the cuirass.

'Heim! how heavy it is,' said Samuel.

'Old—massive—out of fashion.'

'An object of virtue.'

'Six crowns—will you take it?'

'How, six crowns! and you gave ten yonder, for the remains of an old corslet?'

'Six crowns, yes or no!' repeated the merchant.

'But consider the carvings, then!'

'To sell again by weight, of what use are the carvings?'

'Oh! oh! you bargain here,' said Samuel, 'and yonder you gave just what they liked.'

'I will add another crown,' said the merchant impatiently.

'The gilding alone is worth fourteen crowns.'

'Come, make up your mind,' said the merchant.

'Good,' said Samuel, 'you are a droll merchant. You conceal yourself to carry on your trade; you contravene the edicts of the King, and you beat down honest people.'

'Come, come, don't talk aloud like that.'

'Oh! I'm not afraid,' said Samuel, raising his voice, 'I do not carry on an illicit trade, and nothing forces me to conceal myself.'

'Well! come take ten crowns, and hold your tongue.'

'Ten crowns! I tell you that the gold alone is worth the money; ah! you want to escape?'

'No, no! what a madman!'

'Ah! if you attempt to escape, I shall call to the guard!'

In saying these words, Samuel had so raised his voice, that he had effectually fulfilled his menace, without doing so.

At this noise, a small window was opened at the balcony of the house, against which the bargain was made, and the merchant heard, with terror, the creaking made in opening it.

'Come, come,' said he, 'I see plainly I must do just as you like, take fifteen crowns, and be off with you.'

'With all my heart,' said Samuel, pocketing the fifteen crowns.

'Tis very lucky.'

'But these fifteen crowns are for my master,' continued Samuel, 'and I must have a trifle for myself as well.'

The merchant looked round him, drawing his dagger half out of its sheath. Evidently he had intended to make such a rent in the skin of Samuel as would for ever prevent his purchasing a cuirass, to replace the one he had sold; but Samuel had an eye as sharp as a sparrow picking up his crumbs, and drew back, saying,—

'Yes, yes, good merchant, I see your dagger; but I also see something else; that figure at the balcony who is eyeing you as well.'

The merchant, pale with fright, looked in the direction indicated by Samuel, and saw, indeed, at the balcony a tall and fantastic creature, enveloped in a dressing-gown, with furs of catskins; this argus had lost neither a syllable nor a gesture of this last scene.

'Well, well, you do just as you like with me,' said the merchant, with a grin like a hyena showing his teeth; 'there's another crown; and may the devil choke you,' he added quietly.

'Thank you,' said Samuel, 'a good trade.'

And saluting the man with the cuirasses, he disappeared with a smile.

The merchant left alone in the street, lifted the cuirass of Pertinax and enclosed it in that of Fournichon.

The bourgeois still looked on, and when he saw the merchant well loaded,—

'It appears, sir,' he said to him, 'that you purchase arms.'

'Why, no, sir,' replied the unfortunate merchant;

'tis by chance, and because the opportunity was offered me.'

'Then chance serves me wonderfully !'

'How, sir ?' demanded the merchant.

'Only fancy that I have here, just within reach, a heap of old iron that is a trouble to me.'

'I do not doubt you; but for the moment you see I have as much as I can carry.'

'I will show them to you at any rate.'

'It is useless, I have no money.'

'No matter for that; I will give you credit; you appear to me a perfectly honest man.'

'Thank you, but I have some one waiting for me.'

'Tis strange how it appears to me I know you !' said the bourgeois.

'Me,' said the merchant, endeavouring in vain to repress a shudder.

'Look at this headpiece,' said the bourgeois, bringing, with his long foot, the object alluded to, for he would not quit the window for fear the merchant should steal away. And he placed the headpiece on the balcony and handed it to the merchant.

'You know me,' said the latter, 'that is, you think you know me.'

'That is, that I do know you. Are you not——'

The bourgeois appeared to think; the merchant remained motionless and waiting.

'Are you not Nicholas ?'

The figure of the merchant shook, the helmet trembled in his hand.

'Nicholas ?' he repeated.

'Nicholas Trouchon, ironmonger, Rue de la Cossonnerie ?'

'No, no,' replied the merchant smiling, and breathed like a man respited.

'Never mind, you have a good figure, and must buy the whole armour of me, cuirass, bracelets, and sword.'

'Remember, the trade is prohibited, sir.'

'I know it, your vender cried it loud enough just now.'

'You heard ?'

'Perfectly; you were even liberal in the affair, which gave me the idea of putting myself in relation with you; but be easy, I shall not abuse; I know what trade is, I have been a negotiant, too.'

'Ah! and what did you sell?'

'What did I sell?'

'Yes.'

'Favours.'

'A good trade, sir.'

'And therefore I made my fortune at it, and you see me a bourgeois.'

'I compliment you sincerely.'

'It results that I love my ease, and that I sell all my old iron because it is in my way.'

'I understand that.'

'Here are also the thigh pieces. Ah! and the gloves!'

'But I do not want all this.'

'Nor I neither.'

'I will simply take the cuirass.'

'You only buy cuirasses, then?'

'Yes.'

'It's droll, for you buy to sell again by weight, at least you said so, and iron is iron.'

'It's true, but you see in preference——'

'As you please, buy the cuirass; or perhaps you are right, buy nothing at all.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that in the times we live each wants his arms.'

'What! in a settled peace?'

'My dear friend, if we were in a settled peace, there would not be such a trade in cuirasses. *Ventre de biche!* you must not tell me such things as these.'

'Sir?'

'And so clandestinely too!'

The merchant made a movement to leave.

'But really, the more I look at you,' said the bourgeois, 'the more sure I am that I know you. No, you are not Nicholas Trouchon, but I know you all the same.'

'Silence.'

'And if you buy the cuirasses——'

'Well?'

'Well! I am sure it is to accomplish a work agreeable to the Almighty.'

'Hold your tongue!'

'You enchant me,' said the bourgeois, stretching from the balcony an immense arm, the hand of which grasped that of the merchant.

'But who the devil are you?' demanded the latter, who felt his hand clutched in a vice.

'I am Robert Briquet, surnamed the terror of schism, a friend of the union, and an outrageous Catholic; now, I recognise you positively.'

The merchant again became pale.

'You are Nicholas—Grimbelot, leather currier?'

'No, you are wrong; adieu, Maitre Robert Briquet; enchanted at having made your acquaintance.'

And the merchant turned his back on the balcony.

'How! you are going?'

'You see it plainly.'

'Without taking my iron?'

'I have no money about me; I told you so.'

'My valet shall follow you.'

'Impossible.'

'What is to be done then?'

'Let us remain as we are.'

'Ventre de biche! I will take good care not; I am too desirous to cultivate your friendship.'

'And I to fly from yours,' replied the merchant, who, by this time, resigning himself to abandon his cuirasses, and lose all rather than be recognised, took to his heels and fled.

But Robert Briquet was not a man to be thus beaten. He cleared his balcony, descended into the street, almost without being obliged to jump, and in five or six strides reached the merchant.

'Are you mad, my friend?' he said, placing his large hand on the shoulder of the poor devil, 'if I were your enemy, if I wished to arrest you, I have but to cry; the watch passes at this hour in the Rue des Augustins; but no, you are my friend, or the devil fetch me; and the proof is that now I positively remember your name.'

This time the merchant burst into a laugh.

Robert Briquet placed himself opposite to him.

'Your name is Nicholas Poulain,' he said; 'you are lieutenant of the provostship of Paris; I remember well that there was a Nicholas there.'

'I am lost!' stammered the merchant.

'On the contrary, you are saved. Ventre de biche! you will never do as much for the good cause as I have the intention of doing.'

A groan escaped from the bosom of Nicholas Poulain.

'Come, come, courage,' said Robert Briquet; 'recover yourself, you have found a brother, brother Briquet. Take you one cuirass, I will take the two others, I will make you a present of my bracelets, thigh pieces, and my gloves into the bargain; come, forward, and long live the union!'

'You accompany me?'

'I assist you to carry these arms, which must conquer the Philistines; show me the way, I follow you.'

There arose in the mind of the unfortunate lieutenant of the provost of Paris, a flash of suspicion quite natural, but which vanished as soon as it appeared.

'If he wished to ruin me,' he muttered to himself, 'would he have avowed that he knew me?'

'Then aloud,—

'Well, since you absolutely wish it, come with me,' he said.

'To live or to die!' said Robert Briquet, squeezing with one hand the hand of his friend; whilst with the other, he raised triumphantly in the air his bundle of iron.

The two then set off.

After walking about twenty minutes, Nicholas Poulain arrived in the Marais; he was quite in a sweat, as much from the rapidity of his journey as from the warmth of their political conversation.

'What a recruit I have made!' murmured Nicholas Poulain, stopping a short distance from the Hotel de Guise.

'I suspected my armour went hereabouts,' said Robert Briquet.

'Friend,' said Nicholas Poulain, turning round with a tragical gesture to Robert Briquet, 'before entering the lion's den, I leave you a last moment for reflection; you have time to retire, if your conscience is not over strong.'

'Bah! said Briquet, 'I have seen many others, *et non intremuit medulla mea*,' he declaimed; 'ah! pardon; you do not know Latin, perhaps?'

'You do, it seems.'

'As you say.'

'Lettered, bold, active, rich; what a friend!' said Poulain to himself; 'come, let us enter.'

And he conducted Briquet to a gigantic door of the

Hotel de Guise, which opened at the third blow of the bronze knocker.

The court was filled with guards and men wrapped in their cloaks, who sauntered about like phantoms.

There was not a single light in the hotel. Eight horses, saddled and bridled, waited in a corner. The noise of the hammer caused most of the men to turn round, and they formed a sort of hedge to receive the new-comers.

Nicholas Poulain, then, leaning to the ear of a sort of concierge, who held the wicket half open, mentioned his name.

'And I bring a good companion,' he said.

'Pass, messieurs,' said the concierge.

'Carry this to the magazine,' said Poulain, handing to the guard the three cuirasses, besides the iron of Robert Briquet.

'Good; there is a magazine here,' said the latter; 'better and better; what a manager you are.'

'Yes, yes; we have judgment,' replied Poulain, smiling with pride; 'but come, let me present you.'

'Take care,' said the bourgeois, 'I am excessively timid. If I am tolerated, 'tis all I desire; when I have given proofs I will present myself alone, as the Greek says, by my deeds.'

'As you like,' replied the lieutenant of the provost; 'wait for me here, then.'

And he shook hands with most of the promenaders.

'What are we waiting for?' demanded a voice.

'The master,' replied another voice.

At this moment, a tall man entered the hotel; he had heard the last words exchanged between the mysterious promenaders.

'Messieurs, I come in his name.'

'Ah! 'tis Monsieur de Mayneville,' exclaimed Poulain.

'And here I am, in a country of friends,' said Robert Briquet to himself, and assuming a grimace which completely disfigured him.

'Messieurs, we are complete; let us deliberate,' continued the voice which had first spoken.

'Ah, good,' said Briquet, 'another, this one is my lawyer, Maitre Marteau.'

And he changed the grimace with a facility which proved how familiar to him were the physiognomical studies.

'Let us mount, Messieurs.' said Poulain.

M. de Mayneville passed the first; Nicholas Poulain followed him; the men with the cloaks after Nicholas Poulain, and Robert Briquet brought up the rear.

All ascended the steps of an outside staircase, ending in a vaulted room.

Robert Briquet ascended with the others, murmuring all the while,—

'But the page—where, then, is this devil of a page?'

CHAPTER XI

THE LEAGUE AGAIN

At the moment Robert Briquet mounted the stairs at the tail of the others, giving himself, as much as possible, the air of a conspirator, he remarked that Nicholas Poulain, after speaking to several of his colleagues, waited at the door of the vault.

'This must be for me,' said Robert to himself.

In fact, the lieutenant stopped his new friend at the very moment he was about to step over the redoubtable threshold.

'You will not be angry with me,' he said to him, 'but most of our friends do not know you, and wish to have some information about you before admitting you to the council.'

'Tis quite right,' replied Robert, 'and you know that my natural modesty had already foreseen this objection.'

'I render you justice,' replied Poulain, 'you are an accomplished man.'

'I retire, then,' pursued Briquet, 'very happy in having seen in one night so many brave defenders of the Catholic Union.'

'Do you wish me to reconduct you?' said Poulain.

'No, thank you; it is not worth while.'

'Tis that they may give you some trouble at the door; and on the other hand, they await me.'

'Have you not a password on leaving? I do not recognise you there, Maitre Nicholas; it is not prudent.'

'Yes.'

'Well, give it me?'

'Well, really, since you have entered——'

'And that we are friends.'

'Just so; you have only to say—*Parma and Lorraine*.

'And the porter will open to me.'

'At the same moment.'

'Very well; thank you. Go to your affairs. I return to mine.'

Nicholas Poulain separated from his companion and joined his colleagues.

Briquet took a few steps, as if descending to the court; but, arrived at the first step of the staircase, he stopped to explore the localities.

The result of his observations was that the vault ran parallel with the exterior wall, which it sheltered by a large awning. It was evident that this vault led to some lower hall, fitted for this mysterious reunion, to which Briquet had not the honour to be admitted.

What confirmed him in this supposition, which soon became a certainty, was, that he saw a light appear at a grated window, pierced in the wall, and defended by a sort of wooden funnel, such as are now placed at the windows of prisons or convents, to intercept the sight from without and leave only the air and the sight of heaven.

Briquet rightly supposed that this window was that of the hall of assembly, and that if he could but reach it, the position would be favourable to an observation; and that, placed at this observatory, the eye might easily supply the other senses.

But the difficulty was to arrive at this observatory, and to secure a place where he might see without being seen. Briquet looked round him.

In the court were the pages with their horses, the soldiers with their halberds, and the porter with his keys; all quick and sharp sighted gentry.

Luckily the court was extensive, and the night dark.

Besides, pages and soldiers having seen disappear the confidants under the vault, troubled themselves no further, and the porter, knowing the doors well closed, and the impossibility of their leaving without the pass-word, busied himself about preparing his bed for the night, and to attend to a nice pot of spiced wine which simmered on the fire.

In curiosity, there are stimulants as strong as in the excitement of any other passion. This craving after knowledge is so great, that it has caused the death of more than one discoverer.

Briquet had obtained too much information hitherto, not to wish to complete his budget. He again looked round him, and, fascinated by the light which the window threw against the bars of iron, he fancied he saw in this reflection a signal of appeal, and in the shining bars, some provocation for his robust wrists.

In consequence, resolved upon reaching this funnel, Briquet glided along the cornice which from the door-step (which it seemed to continue as an ornament) led to this window; and followed the wall, as a cat or a monkey would have done, walking, with his hands and feet, clinging to the ornaments sculptured in the wall.

If the pages and soldiers could have distinguished in the shade, this fantastic figure gliding along the middle of the wall, without apparent support, they would certainly not have failed to cry out 'magic !' and more than one of them, among the bravest, would have felt his hair stand on end.

But Robert Briquet left them no time to observe his sorceries.

In four strides, he touched the bars, clung to them, squeezed himself between the bars and the funnel, in such a manner that from without he could not be seen, and that from within he was almost masked by the grillage.

Briquet was not deceived, and he was amply recompensed for his trouble and audacity, when once arrived there.

In fact his view embraced a vast hall, lighted by an iron lamp with four sockets, and filled with armour of every sort, among which, in searching well, he might certainly have recognised his gorget and bracelets.

The pikes, long swords, halberds, and muskets collected there, and ranged in piles or festoons, would have sufficed to arm four good regiments.

Briquet, however, paid less attention to the superb display of arms, than to the assembly charged to put them in use or to distribute them. His burning eye pierced through the thick window covered with a dense mass of smoke and dust, in order to guess at the faces of friends under the visors or hoods.

'Oh! oh!' said he, 'here is Maitre Crucè, our revolutionary; and our little Brigard, the grocer at the corner of the Rue des Lombards; here is Maitre Leclerc, who calls himself Bussy, and who would certainly not have committed such a sacrilege whilst the real Bussy had lived. I must one day ask this old fencing master if he knows the secret box in which a certain David of my acquaintance died at Lyons. Peste! the bourgeoisie is superbly represented, but the nobility—Ah! Monsieur de Mayneville; may God pardon me, he is shaking hands with Nicholas Poulain; 'tis touching, they fraternise. Ah! ah! this Monsieur de Mayneville is an orator then! he is preparing, I think, to pronounce an harangue. He has an agreeable manner, and rolls his eyes in a persuasive fashion.'

And, in fact, M. de Mayneville had commenced a discourse.

Robert Briquet shook his head whilst M. de Mayneville spoke; not that he could hear a word of the subject; but he interpreted his gestures and those of the assembly.

'He does not appear to carry his audience with him; Crucè makes mouths at him, Lachapelle Marteau turns his back to him, and Bussy Leclerc shrugs his shoulders. Come, come, M. de Mayneville, speak, sweat, get out of breath, be eloquent. *Ventre de biche!* oh! at length the audience revive. Oh! oh! they get together, they shake hands; they throw their caps in the air. The devil!'

Briquet, as we have said, could see but could not hear; but we, who are present in spirit at the deliberations of the stormy meeting, will inform the reader what passed there.

In the first place, Crucè, Marteau, and Bussy, complained to M. de Mayneville of the inaction of the Duke de Guise.

Marteau, in his quality of procurator, led off.

'Monsieur de Mayneville,' he said, 'you appear on the part of the Duke Henri de Guise? Thank you. And we accept you as ambassador; but the presence of the duke himself is indispensable to us. After the death of his glorious father, at the age of eighteen, he made every good Frenchman adopt the project of the union, and we have all enrolled ourselves under his banner. In accordance with our oath, we have exposed our persons, and sacrificed our fortunes, for the triumph of this sacred cause. And

yet, in spite of our sacrifices, nothing progresses—nothing is decided. Take care, Monsieur de Mayneville, the Parisians will grow tired; but Paris once wearied, what will they do in France? M. the Duke should think of this.'

This exordium obtained the assent of all the leaguers, and Nicholas Poulain, especially, distinguished himself by his zeal in applauding.

M. de Mayneville replied with candour:—

'Messieurs, if nothing is decided, 'tis that nothing is yet ripe. Examine the position, I beg you. M. the Duke, and his brother the cardinal, are at Nancy, making observations. The one is putting on foot an army, intended to keep in check the Huguenots of Flanders, which M. the Duke of Anjou would throw upon us by way of employment; the other sends courier upon courier to all the clergy of France and to the pope, to adopt the union. M. the Duke de Guise knows what you are ignorant of, messieurs; which is, that the old alliance, scarcely broken, between the Duke of Anjou and the Bearnais, is ready to be renewed. They find it necessary to occupy Spain on the side of Navarre, and to prevent him sending us arms and money. But M. the Duke, before attempting anything, and especially before arriving in Paris, wishes to be in a state to combat heresy and usurpation. But failing M. de Guise, we have M. de Mayenne, who multiplies himself as a general and as a councillor, and whom I expect every moment.'

'That means,' interrupted Bussy, and it was at this moment that he shrugged his shoulders, 'that means that your princes are in every place where we are not, and never where we want them to be. What is Madame de Montpensier doing, for example?'

'Monsieur, Madame de Montpensier has this morning entered Paris.'

'And no one has seen her?'

'Some one has seen her, sir.'

'And who is this person?'

'Salcède.'

'Oh! oh!' said those present.

'But,' said Crucé, 'she has made herself invisible, then?'

'Not altogether, but not seizable, I hope.'

'And how is it known that she is here?' inquired

Nicholas Poulain; 'I presume it was not Salcède who told you so ?'

'I know that she is here,' replied Mayneville, 'because I accompanied her to the gate of Saint Antoine.'

'I heard it said that they had closed the gates,' interrupted Marteau, who coveted the opportunity of making a second discourse.

'Yes, sir,' replied Mayneville, with his eternal politeness, of which no attack could deprive him.

'How did she contrive to open them, then ?'

'In her own fashion.'

'Has she the power to open the gates of Paris ?' said the leaguers, jealous and suspicious, as are always the people when they ally themselves with those above them.

'Messieurs,' said Mayneville, 'there took place at the gates of Paris this morning, an affair of which you appear ignorant, or at least to know but vaguely. Orders were given that the barrier should only be crossed by those who were the bearers of a card of admission. Who signed this card, I know not. But before us, at the gate Saint Antoine, five or six men, four of whom were meanly clad, and ill-looking, were the bearers of these favoured cards, and passed before our face. Some among them had the insolent buffoonery of men who find themselves in a conquered country. Who are these men ? What are these cards ? Reply, citizens of Paris, you who are charged to be ignorant of nothing touching the affairs of our city.'

Thus Mayneville, from being the accused, became the accuser, which is a great hit in the art of oratory.

'Cards ! insolent fellows ! exclusive admission to the gates of Paris ; oh ! oh ! and what does this mean ?' demanded Nicholas Poulain, in a deep reverie.

'If you do not know these things, you who live here, how should we know them who live in Lorraine, passing all our time in travelling, to unite the two ends of the circle called the union ?'

'And how did these gentry arrive ?'

'Some on foot, others on horseback ; some alone, others with servants.'

'Are they King's men ?'

'Three or four had the appearance of beggars.'

'Are they soldiers ?'

'They had but two swords amongst six.'

'They are strangers?'

'I take them to be Gascons.'

'Oh!' said some voices, in a tone of contempt.

'Never mind,' said Bussy, 'were they Turks they ought to awaken our suspicions. We will inquire about them; Monsieur Poulain, 'tis your affair. But all this tells us nothing as to the affairs of the league.'

'There is a fresh plan,' replied M. de Mayneville; 'you will know to-morrow that Salcède, who had already betrayed us, and who was to betray us again, not only has not spoken, but has also retracted on the scaffold; and this, thanks to the duchess, who, entering in the suite of one of these holders of cards, had the courage to penetrate to the scaffold; at the risk of being crushed fifty times, and to show herself to the patient, at the risk of being recognised. 'Twas at this moment that Salcède stopped in his effusion; in another instant our honest executioner stopped his penitent career. Thus, messieurs, you have nothing to fear on the side of our enterprises in Flanders. This terrible secret has been sent rolling to the tomb.'

It was this last sentence which had drawn together the leaguers of M. de Mayneville.

Briquet divined their joy by their movements. This joy greatly disturbed the worthy bourgeois, who appeared to take a sudden resolution.

He slid from his funnel to the pavement of the court, and hastened to the door, where, on pronouncing the two words, *Parma and Lorraine*, the porter allowed him passage.

Once in the street, Maitre Robert Briquet breathed so lustily, that we may suppose that for some time he had retained his breath.

The council still continued; history informs us what took place there.

M. de Mayneville, on the part of the Guises, brought to the future insurgents of Paris, the whole plan of the insurrection.

It consisted in nothing less than to cut the throats of the most important personages of the city, known to be in favour of the King; to run through the streets, crying, 'Long live the mass! death to the statesmen!' and thus light up a new Saint Bartholomew with the relics of the

old one; only in this one, they confounded lukewarm Catholics with Huguenots of every description.

In thus acting they served two Gods; Him who reigns in heaven, and he who was to reign over France :

The Eternal ! and M. de Guise !

CHAPTER XII

THE CHAMBER OF HIS MAJESTY HENRY THE THIRD AT THE LOUVRE

IN this grand chamber of the Louvre, in which our readers have already so often entered with us, and in which we have seen the poor King, Henry the Third, spend so many long and cruel hours, we shall find him once more, no longer King, no longer master, but dejected, pale, uneasy, and left without reserve to the persecution of the shadows, which his remembrance incessantly evoked within these illustrious vaults.

Henry was much changed since the fatal death of his friends, which we have elsewhere narrated. This sorrow had passed over his head like a devastating storm; and the poor King, who, still remembering that he was a man, had placed his strength and his confidence on private friendship, saw himself deprived, by envious death, of all confidence and all strength—thus anticipating the terrible moment in which kings resign themselves to God—alone—without friends—without guardians—and without a crown.

Henry the Third had been cruelly afflicted. All that he loved had successively fallen around him. After Schomberg, Quelus, and Maugiron, killed in duel by Livarot and Antraguët, Saint Megrin had been assassinated by M. de Mayenne; the wounds remained painful and bloody. The affection he bore his new favourites, d'Épernon and Joyeuse, resembled that of a father, who, having lost his favoured children, falls back upon those who remain to him; whilst, perfectly aware of the defects of these, he loves them, he indulges them, he guards them, that he may leave death no power over them.

He had loaded d'Épernon with wealth, and yet he only loved d'Épernon at times, and from caprice. At certain

moments, even, he hated him. It was then, that Catherine, that un pitying counsellor, in whom thought was always on the watch, like the lamp in a tabernacle; it was then, that Catherine, incapable of folly, even in her youth, took the voice of the people to blame the affections of the King.

Never had she said to him, when he emptied the treasury to erect into a duchy the domain of La Valette, and royally aggrandise it—never had she said to him, ‘Sire, hate these men, who do not love you, or, what is much worse, who only love you for themselves.’ But did she see the brow of the King knit; did she hear him, in a moment of weariness, accuse d’Epernon of avarice or of cowardice; she directly found the inflexible word that summed up all the griefs of the people and of royalty against d’Epernon, and which ploughed another furrow in the royal hatred.

D’Epernon, but half a Gascon, with his finesse and his native perversity, had taken the measure of the royal weakness; he knew how to conceal his ambition, an ambition without an object, the aim of which was still unknown to himself; but his greediness served him as a compass to direct him towards the distant and unexplored world, which still hid from him the horizon of the future; and it was by this greediness alone that he governed himself.

Was the treasury tolerably well furnished, then was seen to rise and approach d’Epernon, his arms rounded and his face in smiles; was the treasury empty, he disappeared, the lip scornful and his brows knitted, to shut himself up either in his hotel or in one of his chateaux, where he bewailed poverty, until he had taken the poor King by the weakness of his heart, and drawn from him some fresh gift.

By him, favouritism had become a trade—a trade of which he skilfully turned to profit every possible revenue. At first, he allowed the King no delay in the payments when due; but when he afterwards became courtier, and the capricious winds of the royal favour were sufficiently frequent to satisfy his Gascon brains—afterwards, we say, he consented to take upon himself a part of the work; that is, to co-operate in the receipt of the funds which he intended to make his prey.

This necessity, he found, compelled him to become, from

an idle courtier, which is the best of all the stages, an active courtier, which is the worst of all conditions. He then bitterly deplored the easy pleasures of Quelus, of Schomberg, and of Maugiron, who themselves had never in their lives mentioned affairs either public or private, and who so easily converted favours into gold, and gold into pleasures. But the times had changed; the age of iron had succeeded the age of gold; money came not as formerly; it was necessary to go to the money, to dig it, in order to take it from the veins of the people, like a mine half exhausted. D'Epernon resigned himself, and launched greedily in the inextricable mazes of administration, laying waste here and there in his passage, and squeezing, without reckoning the curses, which the sound of the golden crowns covered, the voice of the people.

The rapid and very incomplete sketch we have traced of the character of Joyeuse, will show the reader what a difference there was between the two favourites, who shared, we will not say the friendship, but that large portion of influence which Henry always allowed those who surrounded him to have over himself and over France. Joyeuse, quite naturally, and without reflection, had followed the steps, and adopted the tradition of Quelus, Schomberg, Maugiron, and Saint Megrin; he loved the King, and was unconsciously loved by him. But all these strange rumours which had sprung up, as to the wonderful friendship the King bore to the predecessors of Joyeuse, had died with the friendships; no unworthy stain soiled the affection, almost paternal, of Henry for Joyeuse. Of a family of brave and illustrious men, Joyeuse had, at least in public, the respect of royalty, and his familiarity never passed certain limits. Anne was young, passionate, amorous—and when amorous, an egotist; 'twas little for him to be happy through the King, and to return this happiness to its source; for him it was everything to be happy in some way, whatever it might be. Brave, handsome, rich, he shone with that triple reflection which places on the brow of youth a crown of love. Nature had done too much for Joyeuse; and Henry sometimes cursed the nature which had left to him, a king, so little to do for his friend.

Henry well knew these two men, and loved them, no doubt, for their contrast. Under his sceptical and superstitious envelope, Henry concealed a fund of philosophy,

which, without Catherine, would have developed itself in a sense of remarkable utility.

Often betrayed, Henry was never deceived.

It was therefore with this perfect knowledge of the character of his friends, with this profound conviction of their virtues and their vices, that, separated from them, isolated, sad, in this gloomy chamber, he thought of them, of himself, of his life; and saw, as through a mist, these cloudy horizons which were already observable in the future, in the eyes of many less far-seeing than himself.

This affair of Salcède had greatly annoyed him. Alone, between two women at such a moment, Henry had felt his loneliness; the weakness of Louise grieved him; the strength of Catherine overcame him. Henry, in fact, felt in himself that vague and eternal terror which accompany kings marked out by fate, that with them a race may drop into abeyance.

To perceive, in fact, that although elevated above all men, this grandeur has no solid basis; to feel that we are the statue to whom is offered the incense; the idol who is adored; but that the priests and the people, the worshippers and the ministers, bend you or support you according to their interest, make you oscillate according to their caprice, is, to a proud spirit, the cruellest of disgraces. Henry felt it severely, and it irritated him to feel it.

And yet, at times, he again resumed the energy of his youth, in him extinguished long before the expiration of this youth.

'After all,' he said to himself, 'why should I disturb myself? I have no more wars to go through; Guise is at Nancy, Henry at Pau; the one is obliged to confine his ambition to himself, the other never had any. People's minds are calmed, no Frenchman has seriously thought of this impossible enterprise, of dethroning his king; this third crown, promised by the golden scissors of Madame de Montpensier, is nothing but the idle talk of a woman whose pride and self-love are wounded; my mother alone still dreams of her phantom of usurpation, without the power of seriously pointing out the usurper; but I, who am a man, I who have still a young head, despite my troubles, I know how to contend against the pretenders she fears.

'I will render Henry of Navarre ridiculous, Guise

odious, and I will scatter, sword in hand, the foreign leagues. Mordieux! I am as good now as I was at Jarnac and at Moncontour!

'Yes,' continued Henry, letting his head fall on his bosom; 'but in the meantime I am wearied, and 'tis mortal to be wearied. Ah! there is my real, my only conspirator, ennui! and my mother never speaks to me of that.'

'Let us see if any one comes to me to-night: Joyeuse has too often promised to be here early; he is one who amuses himself; but how the devil does he contrive to amuse himself? D'Epernon? ah! he does not amuse himself; he sulks; he has not yet touched his treaty of twenty-five thousand crowns on the cloven feet; well, my faith! let him sulk quite at his ease.'

'Sire,' said the voice of the usher, 'M. the Duke d'Epernon.'

Those who know the wearisomeness of waiting, the recriminations it suggests against the individuals expected, the facility with which the cloud is dissipated when the person appears, will understand the eagerness displayed by the King in ordering a folding-chair to be placed for the duke.

'Ah! good-even, duke,' he said, 'I am enchanted at seeing you.'

D'Epernon bowed respectfully.

'Why did you not come to see that rogue of a Spaniard quartered? you well know you had a place in my lodge, as I told you so.'

'Sire, I was prevented.'

'You were prevented?'

'Yes, sire, I had business.'

'One would really think that, with your face a foot long, you were come to announce to me that a subsidy had not been paid,' said Henry, shrugging his shoulders.

'My faith, sire,' said d'Epernon, hitting the ball at its bound, 'your Majesty says true, the subsidy has not been paid, and I am without a crown.'

'Good,' said Henry, impatient.

'But,' continued d'Epernon, 'I am not come to speak of this, and I hasten to inform your Majesty so, for your Majesty may think these are the affairs in which I am occupied.'

'Let us hear the business, duke.'

'Your Majesty knows what took place at the execution of Salcède.'

'Parbleu ! since I was there ?'

'They attempted to carry off the condemned.'

'I did not see that.'

'The rumour runs through the city, however.'

'A rumour without cause and without effect; they did not stir.'

'I think your Majesty is in error.'

'And on what do you ground your belief ?'

'Upon this, that Salcède denied before the people that which he said before the judges.'

'Ah ! you already know that ?'

'I endeavour to know all that interests your Majesty.'

'Thank you, but what are you coming to with this preamble ?'

'To this, a man who dies like Salcède, dies like a faithful servitor, sire.'

'Well ! what then ?'

'The master who has such servants is very lucky; that's all.'

'And you mean that I have no such servants; or rather, that I have them no longer ? you are right, if that is your meaning.'

'That is not my meaning. Your Majesty will find, when requisite, and I can answer for it better than any one, servants as faithful as those possessed by the master of Salcède.'

'The master of Salcède—the master of Salcède ! Call things for once, then, by their proper names; how is he named, this master ?'

'Your Majesty should know better than I, you busy yourself with politics.'

'I know what I know. Tell me what you know.'

'I know nothing; but I suspect many things.'

'Good,' said Henry, 'you are come here to frighten me and tell me disagreeable things, are you not ? Thank you, duke, I recognise you well there.'

'In that your Majesty uses me ill,' said d'Epernon.

'Tis very just, I think.'

'No, sire. The warning of a faithful man may be despised; but the man does not less do his duty in giving the warning'

'These are my affairs.'

'Ah! the moment your Majesty thus receives it, you are right, sire; let us say no more about them then.'

There was now a silence, which the King first interrupted.

'Come,' said he, 'do not dishearten me, duke; I am already as gloomy as an Egyptian Pharaoh in his pyramid. Enliven me.'

'Ah! sire, we cannot command joy.'

The King struck the table with his fist, in a rage.

'You are obstinate; a poor friend, duke!' he exclaimed. 'Alas, alas! I did not think I had lost so much, in losing my old servitors.'

'May I make bold to remark to your Majesty that you do not much encourage the new ones?'

Here the King made a fresh pause, during which, as his only reply, he regarded this man, whose great fortune he had made, with the most significative expression.

D'Epernon understood.

'Your Majesty reproaches me with your gifts,' he said, in the tone of a finished Gascon. 'For myself, I do not reproach him with my devotedness.'

And the duke, who had not yet seated himself, took the folding-chair which the King had ordered for him.

'La Valette, La Valette,' said Henry, in sadness, 'you break my heart; you who have such spirits, who could by your good humour make me gay and joyful, God is my witness, that I never heard mentioned Quelus, so brave; Schomberg, so kind; Maugiron, so delicate respecting my honour. No. At that time there was even a Bussy; Bussy, who was not mine, if you will, but whom I should have acquired, had I not feared to give umbrage to others; Bussy, who was the involuntary cause of their death. Alas! to what am I fallen, that I regret even my enemies? Certainly all four were brave men. Eh, my God! be not angry at what I say! What would you, La Valette? 'tis not your temperament to deal a rapier's blow upon every comer at all hours of the day; but indeed, dear friend, if you are not adventurous and quick in hand, you are facetious, witty, of good advice at times. You know all my affairs, like that other but more humble friend, with whom I never had a single moment of ennui.'

'Of whom would your Majesty speak?' said the duke.

'You ought to resemble him, d'Epernon.'

'But yet, may I know who your Majesty regrets ?'

'Oh ! poor Chicot, where are you ?'

D'Epernon rose quite piqued.

'Well ! are you going ?' said the King.

'It seems, sire, that your Majesty is in good memory to-day; but really it is not happy for every one.'

'And why so ?'

'Because your Majesty, without intending it perhaps, compares me to Messire Chicot, and that I feel myself but little flattered at the comparison.'

'You are wrong, d'Epernon, I can only compare Chicot to a man whom I love and who loves me. He was a sound and ingenious servitor, was Chicot.'

And Henry heaved a deep sigh.

'It was not to resemble Chicot, I presume, that your Majesty made me a duke and peer ?' said d'Epernon.

'Come, let us not recriminate,' said the King, with a malicious smile; the Gascon (crafty and impudent as he was) felt himself more ill at ease before this mild sarcasm, than he would have been from an open reproach.

'Chicot loved me,' said the King, 'and I miss him; that's all I mean. Ah ! when I think that in the very place in which you are, have passed all these young men, handsome, brave, and faithful; that yonder, on the fauteuil in which you have placed your hat, Chicot has slept so often.'

'He may have been very witty,' interrupted d'Epernon, 'but at all events he was not very respectful.'

'Alas !' continued Henry, 'this dear friend of mine has no more spirit than body now.'

And he sorrowfully agitated his chaplet of death's-heads, which produced a mournful clicking, as if made of real bones.

'Eh ! what is become of your Chicot, then ?' carelessly demanded d'Epernon.

'He is dead !' replied Henry; 'dead, like all who have loved me.'

'Well, sire,' resumed the duke, 'I really think he has done well to die; he was getting old, much less so, however, than his pleasantries; and I have heard that sobriety was not his favourite virtue. What did the poor devil die of, sire—of indigestion ?'

'Chicot died of grief, unfeeling man,' sharply replied the King.

'He must have said so, to make you laugh a last time.'

'There you are wrong; it was, that he would not even sadden me by the announcement of his malady; it was, that he knew how I regret my friends, he who so often saw me weep for them.'

'Then it is his spirit that has returned ?'

'Would to God I saw him again, even as a spirit. No, 'tis his friend the worthy prior Gorenflot, who informed me of this sad news.'

'Gorenflot, who is he ?'

'A holy man, whom I have made prior of the Jacobins, and who inhabits that pretty convent outside the gate of Saint Antoine, opposite the cross Faubin, near Bel-Esbat.'

'Oh ! some evil preacher to whom your Majesty has given a priory of 30,000 livres, of which you take care not to reproach him.'

'You are getting impious, at present.'

'If that would enliven your Majesty, I would attempt.'

'Will you be silent, duke; you offend God !'

'Chicot, however, was very impious, and it seems to me he was pardoned.'

'Chicot came at a time when I could yet laugh at something.'

'Then your Majesty is wrong to regret him.'

'Why so ?'

'If your Majesty can no longer laugh at anything, Chicot, gay as he was, would not be of much service.'

'The man was good at anything, and 'tis not simply on account of his wit that I regret him.'

'And from what cause, then ? not for his face, I presume, for Maitre Chicot was very ugly.'

'He had prudent advice.'

'Come, I see plainly that if he lived, your Majesty would make him keeper of the seals, as you have made a prior of this monk.'

'Come, do not laugh, duke, I beg, at those who have shown me an affection, and for whom I have had some myself. Chicot, now that he is dead, is as sacred to me as a serious friend, and when I have no relish for laughing, I expect no one will laugh.'

'Oh ! be it so, sire, I have no more wish to laugh than your Majesty. What I said was, that, just now, you regretted Chicot for his good humour; that, just now, you requested me to enliven you; whilst now you desire me

to sadden you—parfandious! Oh! pardon, sire, this cursed oath always escapes me.'

'Well, well, I have grown cool now. Now I am at the point you wished to see me at, when you commenced the conversation by such sinister proposals. Tell me then your bad news, d'Epernon; the King has always the strength of a man.'

'I do not doubt it, sire.'

'And 'tis lucky, for ill guarded as I am, if I did not take care of myself, I should be dead a dozen times a day.'

'Which would not displease certain gentry whom I know.'

'Against those, duke, I have the halberds of my Swiss.'

'They're very powerless to reach far.'

'Against those at a distance, I have the muskets of my arquebussiers.'

'They are inconvenient to strike close; to defend a royal breast; that which is worth more than halberds and muskets, are honest bosoms.'

'Alas!' said Henry, 'I had them once, and in these breasts, noble hearts! never did anything happen to me in the time of those living ramparts who were called Quelus, Schomberg, Saint Luc Maugiron, and Saint Megrin.'

'This, then, is what your Majesty regrets?' said d'Epernon, calculating upon seizing his revenge by taking the King in *flagrante delicto* of egotism.

'I regret the hearts that beat in these bosoms, above all things,' said Henry.

'Sire,' said d'Epernon, 'if I dared, I would remark to your Majesty that I am a Gascon; that means, far-seeing and industrious; that I endeavour to supply by wit, the virtues denied me by nature; in a word, that I do all I can, that is, all that I ought, and that, in consequence, I have the right to say, "Let what may, come."'

'Ah! that is how you get out of it; you come and make me a grand display of dangers, true or false, and when you have contrived to frighten me, you sum up in these words, "Let what may, come"; very much obliged, duke.'

'Your Majesty, then, would believe a little in these dangers?'

'Yes. I will believe them, if you prove to me you can combat them.'

'I think I can.'

'I know well you have your resources, your little ways, fox that you are.'

'Not so little.'

'Let us know them, then.'

'Will your Majesty consent to rise?'

'What for?'

'To come with me to the old buildings of the Louvre?'

'Near the Rue de l'Astruce.'

'Precisely, at the place where they are occupied in building a furniture room; a project which was abandoned when your Majesty would have no other furniture than priedieus and chaplets of death's-heads.'

'At this hour?'

'Ten o'clock is striking at the Louvre, it is not so very late, I think.'

'What shall I see in these buildings?'

'Ah, if I tell you 'twill be the means of your not going.'

'Tis very far, duke.'

'By the galleries, we shall arrive there in five minutes, sire.'

'D'Epernon, d'Epernon!'

'Well, sire.'

'If what you are about to show me is not very curious, take care.'

'I will answer for it, sire, that it shall be curious.'

'Come, then,' said the King, rising with an effort.

The duke took his cloak and presented to the King his sword; then taking a torch of wax, he led the way to the gallery, the King following with a wearied step.

CHAPTER XIII

THE DORMITORY

ALTHOUGH it was not yet ten o'clock, as d'Epernon had said, a death-like silence already reigned throughout the Louvre; scarcely, from the loud whistling of the wind, could they hear the regular steps of the sentinels and the groaning of the drawbridges. In less than five minutes, the King and d'Epernon arrived at the buildings of the Rue de l'Astruce, which had preserved its name, even since the erection of Saint German l'Auxerrois.

The duke drew a key from his *aumoniere*, descended a few steps, crossed a small court, opened an arched door, almost hidden by the yellow reeds, and the lower part of which was still encumbered with the long grass. He followed for about a dozen steps a gloomy passage, at the end of which he found himself in an interior court, which at one of its angles looked down a stone staircase.

This staircase led to a vast chamber, or rather an immense corridor. D'Epernon had also the key of this corridor. He gently opened the door, and made Henry remark the singular arrangement which, on the door being opened, immediately met the eye.

It was furnished with forty-five beds, and each bed occupied by a sleeper. The King looked at the beds—looked at the sleepers—and turning towards the duke with an anxious curiosity,—

'Well !' he said, 'who are all these men asleep ?'

'Men who sleep to-night, but who will not sleep from to-morrow, until their turn comes.'

'And why will they not sleep longer ?'

'That your Majesty may sleep.'

'Explain yourself; all these men are friends then ?'

'Chosen by myself, sire; tried like winnowed grain; intrepid guards, who will not quit your Majesty, nor even your shadow; and who, being all gentlemen, having the right to go wherever your Majesty may go, will allow no one to approach within sword's length of your Majesty.'

'And 'tis you who have invented this, d'Epernon ?'

'Eh ! *mon Dieu* ! yes; I alone, sire.'

'They will laugh at them.'

'No; they will fear them.'

'Your gentlemen, then, are very terrible.'

'Sire, they are a pack of hounds, who will dash at any game you please; and who, knowing none but you, having no relations but with your Majesty, will look to none but yourself to have light, life, and warmth.'

'But this will ruin me.'

'Is a king ever ruined ?'

'I cannot, however, yet pay the Swiss.'

'Look well at these new-comers, sire, and tell me if their appearance denotes men of much expense.'

The King looked at the long dormitory, which presented a sight well worthy of attention. The hall was

divided down its whole length by a partition, on which the builder had placed forty-five alcoves, placed like so many chapels side by side, and leading into the passage at one of the extremities, in which were the King and d'Epéron.

A door, in each of the alcoves, led to a sort of inner room. The result of this was that every gentleman had his public room and his private retirement.

In public, he appeared in the alcove; *en famille*, he retired to his little lodge.

The door of each of these small lodges opened on a balcony, running the whole length of the building.

The King could not at first comprehend these minute distinctions.

'Why have you shown me all these asleep in their beds?' inquired the King.

'Because, sire, I thought the inspection would thus be easier to your Majesty. Besides, these alcoves, which have each a number, have an advantage—that of transmitting its number to its occupant. Thus, each of the tenants will be, when necessary, a man or a number.'

'It is very well imagined,' said the King, 'especially if we alone held the key of this arithmetic. But the poor fellows will be stifled, always living in this den.'

'Your Majesty shall make the tour with me, if you would wish it, and enter the apartment of each.'

'Tudieu! what wardrobes you have made for me, d'Epéron!' said the King, casting his eyes on the chairs loaded with the clothes of the sleepers. 'If I shut up the rags of these galliards in them, Paris will laugh loud enough.'

'It is a fact, sire,' replied the duke, 'that my forty-five are not very sumptuously attired; but, sire, if they were all dukes or peers——'

'Yes; I understand,' said the King, smiling; 'they would cost me more than as they are.'

'Well! 'tis even so, sire.'

'How much will they cost me? Come, that will decide me, perhaps; for in truth, d'Epéron, the appearance is not very enticing.'

'Sire, I know well they have grown somewhat thin and swarthy from the sun, which rides high in our southern provinces; but I was thin and sunburnt like these, when I came to Paris; they will grow fat and fair like myself.'

'Hem !' said Henry, casting a side look at d'Epernon. And after a pause,—

'Do you know that your gentlemen snore like choristers ?' said the King.

'Sire, you must not judge them on this point, they have dined well to-day, you see.'

'Stay, here is one who dreams aloud,' said the King, listening with curiosity.

'Really ?'

'Yes, what does he say, then ? listen !'

In fact, one of the gentlemen, his head and arms hanging over the bed, the mouth half open, breathed a few words with a melancholy smile. The King gently approached him.

'If you are a woman,' he said, 'fly, fly !'

'Ah, ah !' said Henry, 'this is a gallant one.'

'How do you call him, sire ?'

'His face is familiar to me.'

D'Epernon brought his flambeau to the alcove.

'He has also white hands, and a well-combed beard.'

'Tis the sire Ernauton de Carmainges, a jolly boy, who will go far.'

'He has left behind him some rustic love, poor devil.'

'To have none other than his King, sire. We will reward him for his sacrifice.'

'Oh, oh ! here is a strange figure after your sire. How did you call him ?'

'Ernauton de Carmainges.'

'Oh, yes. Peste ! what a shirt No. 3 has; it looks like a penitent's sack.'

'That one is M. de Chalabre; if he ruins your Majesty, I will answer for it, it will not be without enriching himself a little.'

'And that other gloomy face, who does not appear to dream of love ?'

'What number, sire ?'

'Number 12.'

'Fine blade, heart of bronze, a man of resources—M. de Saint Maline, sir.'

'Ah, but I have reflected upon it; do you know that you have had an idea in this, La Valette ?'

'I believe it; imagine for a moment, sire, what effect these new guard dogs will produce, who will no more quit your Majesty than the shadow the body; these

Cerberuses, which have been nowhere seen, and who, on the first occasion, will show themselves in a fashion that will do honour to us all.'

'Yes, yes, you are right; 'tis an idea. But listen, then.'

'To what?'

'They will not follow me as my shadow in that dress, I presume. My body has its right shape, and I would not that its shadow, or rather shadows, dishonour it.'

'Oh! we are returning, sire, to the question of expenses?'

'Do you think of eluding it?'

'No, on the contrary, 'tis the fundamental question in everything; but about this expense I have also had an idea.'

'D'Epernon, d'Epernon!' said the King.

'Well, sire? the desire of pleasing your Majesty doubles my imagination.'

'Come, let us have this idea.'

'Well! if it depended upon me, each of these gentlemen should find, to-morrow morning, on the stool that holds his rags, a purse of a thousand crowns, for the payment of the first half-year.'

'A thousand crowns for the first half-year, six thousand livres a year! Why, you are mad, duke; a whole regiment would not cost as much.'

'You forget, sire, that they are destined to be the shadows of your Majesty; and, you have said yourself, that you should wish your shadows to be decently attired. Each therefore will have to take from these thousand crowns, to equip and arm himself in a manner to do you honour; and as to the word honour, leave it a wide birth with the Gascons. But, putting aside fifteen hundred livres for the equipment, it will be forty-five hundred livres for the first year, three thousand for the second, and so on.'

'Tis more acceptable.'

'And your Majesty accepts?'

'There is but one difficulty, duke.'

'Which?'

'The want of money.'

'The want of money?'

'Faith, you ought to know better than any one, that the reason I give you is not a bad one, for you have not been able to get your remittance paid yet.'

'Sire, I have found the means.'

'Of getting money for me?'

'For your guard, sire.'

'What pinch-belly scheme now,' thought the King, regarding d'Epéron sideways. Then, aloud: 'Let us hear the means,' he said.

'They have registered, this very day six months, an edict on the tax on game and fish.'

'It's possible.'

'The payment of the first half-year has given 65,000 crowns, which the treasurer of the savings was to invest this morning, when I told him to do nothing with it; so that, instead of pouring it into the treasury, he holds at the disposition of your Majesty the money of the tax.'

'I intended it for the wars, duke.'

'Well! exactly, sire. The first condition of war is to have men; the first interest of the kingdom is the safety and defence of the King; by securing the safety of the King, we fulfil all these conditions.'

'The argument is not bad; but by your account I see but forty-five thousand crowns made use of, and I shall therefore have twenty thousand left for my regiments.'

'Pardon, sire, I have disposed, saving the pleasure of your Majesty, of these 20,000 crowns.'

'Oh! you have disposed of them?'

'Yes, sire, on account of my pay.'

'I was sure of it,' said the King; 'you give me a guard to obtain your money?' But why this exact number of forty-five?'

'For this, sire—the number three is primordial and divine, besides it is convenient. For example, when a cavalier has three horses, he is never on foot; the second replaces the first when tired, and there remains a third to supply the second in case of wounds or disease. You will therefore have always three times fifteen gentlemen: fifteen for service—thirty who repose. Each service will last twelve hours, and during these twelve hours, you will always have five on the right, five on the left two before, and three behind. Let them attempt to attack you with such a guard.'

'By the mordieu! 'tis well conceived, duke, and I compliment you.'

'Look at them, sire; really they have a very good effect.'

'Yes, dressed, they will not be bad.'

'Think you now that I have a right to speak of the dangers which menace you, sire?'

'I do not deny it.'

'I was right, then?'

'Be it so.'

'M. Joyeuse would not have had such an idea!'

'D'Epernon! d'Epernon! it is not charitable to speak ill of the absent.'

'Parfandious! you speak much ill of the present, sire.'

'Ah! Joyeuse accompanies me everywhere. He was with me at the Grève to-day.'

'Well! and I was there, sire, and your Majesty sees I did not waste my time.'

'Thank you, La Valette.'

'By the way, sire,' said d'Epernon, after a momentary silence, 'I had something to ask of your Majesty.'

'Indeed, it much astonished me, duke, that you had nothing to ask of me.'

'Your Majesty is severe to-day, sire.'

'Eh! no, you do not comprehend, my friend,' said the King, whose raillery was satisfied with its revenge; 'or rather you misunderstand me; I said, that having rendered me a service, you had the right of demanding something; ask then.'

'That makes a difference, sire. Besides, what I solicit of your Majesty is a charge.'

'A place! you, colonel-general of infantry, you wish for another charge; why it will crush you.'

'I am as strong as Samson for the service of your Majesty; I could carry heaven and earth.'

'Make your demand then,' said the King, sighing.

'I solicit your Majesty to give me the command of these forty-five gentlemen.'

'How!' said the King, stupefied, 'you will walk before me, behind me? you will devote yourself to this point, you will be captain of the guards?'

'No, sire, no!'

'Well! what is it then? speak.'

'I wish these guards to understand my command better than that of any other; but I shall neither precede them nor follow them, I shall have a second myself.'

'There is something at the bottom of this,' thought

Henry, shaking his head; 'this devil of a man always gives that he may receive.' Then aloud: 'Well! be it so, you shall have your command.'

'Secret?'

'Yes, but who then will officiate as head of my forty-five?'

'Little Loignac.'

'Ah! so much the better.'

'He is agreeable to your Majesty.'

'Perfectly.'

'Is it thus arranged, sire?'

'Yes, but——'

'But?'

'What part does this Loignac take under you?'

'He is my d'Epernon, sire.'

'He will cost you dear then,' grumbled the King.

'Your Majesty says——'

'I say that I accept.'

'Sire, I will go to the treasurer of the savings for the forty-five purses.'

'To-night?'

'Must not our men find them to-morrow morning on their chairs?'

'Very just. Go; I will return.'

'Contented, sire.'

'Quite so.'

'Well guarded in every way.'

'Yes, by men who sleep with their arms bound.'

'They will keep watch to-morrow, sire.'

D'Epernon reconducted Henry to the door of the gallery and quitted him, saying to himself:—

'If I am not a king, I have guards like a king, and they cost me nothing—parfandious!'

CHAPTER XIV

WE have said that the King was never for a moment deceived in the character of his friends. He knew their faults and their vices, and appeared to have as deep an insight into the human heart, as was permitted to any earthly sovereign.

He had at once perceived the object of d'Epernon;

but as he expected to receive nothing for what he gave, and that, on the contrary, he received forty-five bodyguards in exchange for sixty-five thousand crowns, the idea of the Gascon appeared to him a godsend.

And besides, it was a novelty. A poor king of France is not always overstocked with this merchandise, so rare even for subjects. King Henry the Third, especially, who, when he had finished his processions, combed his dogs, strung his death's-heads, and heaved his usual allowance of sighs, had nothing more to do.'

The guard instituted by d'Epéron pleased the King, then, more especially as it would be spoken of, and that he would be enabled in consequence to read on their physiognomies, something more than he had seen for the last ten years since he had come from Poland.

As by degrees he approached his room, in which was waiting for him the usher, somewhat puzzled at this unusual and nocturnal excursion, Henry developed to himself the advantages of the institution of the forty-five; and like all weak or enfeebled minds, he foresaw, brightening, the ideas which d'Epéron had brought to light in the conversation he had just had with him.

'Au fait !' thought the King, 'these gentlemen will no doubt be very brave, and perhaps very devoted. Some of their figures are prepossessing, others repulsive; there are, thank God ! some of all sorts; and besides, it looks well—a *cortège* of forty-five swords always ready to jump from their scabbards.'

The last link in the chain of his thoughts, leading to the remembrance of those other swords, so devoted, and which he so bitterly regretted aloud, and still more bitterly when alone, produced in Henry that deep depression of spirits into which he so often sank at this period of his life, that it might be said it was his constant companion.

The time so rude, men so wicked, crowns so tottering on the brows of kings, impressed him a second time, with that ardent wish of dying or enlivening himself, to issue for a moment from that disease which, already at this period, the English—our masters in melancholy—had baptised with the name of spleen.

He looked round for Joyeuse, and seeing him nowhere, he inquired for him.

'M. the Duke is not yet returned,' said the usher.

'Oh, very well; call my valets de chambre and retire.'

'Sire,' the chamber of your Majesty is ready, and her Majesty the Queen has sent to demand the orders of the King.'

Henry pretended not to hear.

'Must I say to Her Majesty that she may place the pillow?' hazarded the usher.

'No,' said Henry, 'I have my devotions; I have some work: and besides, I am suffering;—I will sleep alone.'

The usher bowed.

'By the way,' said Henry, recalling him; 'carry to the Queen these Eastern comfitures; they produce sleep.'

And he handed his comfit box to the usher.

The King entered his room, which his valets had, in fact, prepared; once there, Henry glanced at all the accessories, so *recherché*, so minute, of those extravagant toilets which he had lately made, in order to be the most religious of men, not being enabled to appear as the grandest of kings.

It made little impression on him, however; all that he once had of the woman, in his hermaphrodite organisation, had disappeared. Henry was like one of those old coquettes who have exchanged their mirror for the prayer-book; he almost held in horror, objects which he had most cherished.

Gloves, perfumed and unctuous, masks of fine linen, impregnated with paste, chemical compounds to curl the hair, blacken the beard, redden the ears, and make the eyes sparkle; he neglected all this, as he had done for some time past.

'My bed!' said he, with a sigh.

Two servants undressed him, drew over him a pair of drawers of fine Friesland wool, and raising him carefully, they slid him between the sheets.

'His Majesty's reader!' cried a voice.

For Henry, a man subject to long and cruel want of sleep, had himself sometimes read to sleep, and now indeed it required a Polander to accomplish this miracle, whilst formerly, that is originally, he was satisfied with a Frenchman.

'No, no one,' said Henry, 'no reader, or let him read prayers, by himself, for my good; but if M. de Joyeuse returns, bring him to me.'

'But if he returns late, sire?'

'Alas !' said Henry, 'he always enters late; but at whatever hour he returns, you hear, I wish to see him.'

The domestics extinguished the wax candles, lighted near the fire a scented lamp which produced a pale and bluish flame, a sort of phantasmagoric amusement of which the King seemed very fond since the return of his sepulchral ideas; they then quitted as gently as possible his silent chamber.

Henry, brave in the face of a real danger, had all the fears, all the weaknesses of children and of women. He was frightened at apparitions, he feared spirits, and yet this feeling amused him; being afraid, he was the less bored. In this, like the prisoner, who, wearied of the idleness of a long captivity, replied to those who announced to him that he was about to undergo the question,—

'Good, I shall be able to pass away a moment.'

However, whilst still following the reflections of his lamp against the walls, whilst still piercing with his eye the most obscure corners of his chamber, whilst still endeavouring to catch the slightest murmur, which might have denounced the mysterious entrance of a spirit, Henry's eyes, fatigued with the spectacle of the morning, and the walk of the evening, or rather night, closed themselves; and he soon slept, or rather stupefied himself in this quietness and solitude.

But Henry's repose did not continue long; undetermined by that slow fever, which in him consumed his life, during his sleep, as in his days of watching, he fancied he heard a noise in his chamber and awoke.

'Joyeuse,' he said, 'is it you ?'

No one replied.

The blue flame of the lamp was getting feeble, it now only described on the ceiling of sculptured oak, a palish circle, which turned to a greenish hue the gold of the cornices.

'Alone ! still alone,' murmured the King; 'ah ! the prophet is right, majesty should always sigh; he would have done better to have said, it always sighs.' And after a moment's pause : 'My God !' he muttered in the form of a prayer, 'give me strength to be always alone during my life, alone, as I shall be after my death !'

'Eh ! eh ! alone after your death, I am not sure,' replied a harsh voice, a few steps from the bed; 'and the worms; what do you take them to be ?'

The King, amazed, sat up in bed, examining with anxiety every piece of furniture in the room.

'Oh! I know that voice,' he murmured.

'Tis lucky,' said the voice.

A cold perspiration stood on the King's forehead.

'It sounds like the voice of Chicot,' he sighed.

'You burn, Henry, you burn,' replied the voice.

Henry, throwing his leg out of bed, now perceived at a short distance from the chimney, in the same fauteuil he had but an hour before indicated to d'Epernon, a head, upon which the fire had reflected one of its yellow flames, which alone, in the interiors of Rembrandt, illumine an individual who at first sight is scarcely distinguished.

This reflection descended upon the elbows of the fauteuil, upon which were resting the arms of the occupant, then upon his swelling and bony knee, then upon an instep forming a right angle with a leg, nervous, thin, and lengthy beyond measure.

'May God protect me!' exclaimed Henry; 'tis Chicot's spirit!'

'Ah! my poor Henriquet,' said the voice, 'you are still as simple as ever.'

'What does that mean?'

'Spirits do not speak, imbecile, as they have no body, and consequently no tongue,' replied the figure seated in the fauteuil.

'You are really Chicot, then,' exclaimed the King, mad with joy.

'I can decide nothing on that head; we shall see by-and-by what I am——'

'What, you are not dead, then, my poor Chicot?'

'Come, good! here you are screaming like an eagle; yes, on the contrary, I am dead, a hundred times dead.'

'Chicot, my only friend!'

'At least you have this advantage over me, to say always the same thing. *You* are not changed. Peste!'

'But you, you,' said the King sorrowfully, 'are you changed, Chicot?'

'I hope so, really.'

'Chicot, my friend,' said the King, placing his two feet on the floor, 'why did you quit me?' Tell me.'

'Because I died.'

'But you said just now that you were not dead.'

'And I repeat it.'

'What means this contradiction ?'

'This contradiction means, Henry, that I am dead to some, and alive to others.'

'And for me, which are you ?'

'For you I am dead.'

'Why dead to me ?'

'Tis easy to comprehend. Listen well.'

'Yes !'

'You are not the master in your own house.'

'How ?'

'You can do nothing for those who serve you.'

'Monsieur Chicot !'

'Don't let us quarrel, or I shall get angry.'

'Yes, you are right,' said the King, trembling lest the spirit of Chicot should vanish; 'speak, my friend, speak.'

'Well, then, I had a little affair to clear up with M. de Mayenne, you remember ?'

'Perfectly.'

'I arrange it; good. I trounce the captain soundly; very good. He has me sought after, to hang me; and you, upon whom I relied to defend me against this hero, instead of supporting me, you abandon me; instead of finishing with him, you get reconciled with him. What did I then do ? I declared myself dead and buried, by the mediation of my friend Gorenflot; so that, since then, M. de Mayenne, who sought for me, seeks me no longer.'

'What a frightful courage you showed, Chicot; did you not know the grief your death would cause me ? Tell me.'

'Yes, 'tis courageous, but not at all frightful. I have never lived so tranquil as I have since every one supposed me dead !'

'Chicot ! Chicot ! my friend,' exclaimed the King, 'you frighten me, my senses are going.'

'Ah, bah ! 'tis only to-day you have found that out ?'

'I can but believe it.'

'Peste ! we must, however, determine you upon something, what do you believe ? let us hear.'

'Well ! I believe that you have died, and returned again.'

'Then I tell a lie; you are polite.'

'You conceal a part of the truth from me, at least; but just now, like the spectres of old, you were telling me some terrible things.'

'Ah! as to that, I do not deny it. Dress yourself, poor King.'

'Yes, yes,' continued Henry, 'confess that you are a spirit raised by the Almighty.'

'I will confess whatever you like.'

'Without this, indeed, how could you come here through the guarded corridors? how did you get here, in my chamber, close to me? any one can enter the Louvre then, now? This is the way in which the King is guarded!'

And Henry, abandoning himself entirely to the imaginary terror that had seized him, threw himself again on the bed, ready to cover his head with the sheets.

'There! there! there!' said Chicot, with an accent which evidenced some pity and much sympathy, 'there! don't excite yourself, you have but to touch me, to be convinced.'

'You are not then a messenger of vengeance?'

'Ventre de biche! have I horns like Satan, then, or a flaming sword like the Archangel Michael?'

'How did you enter, then?'

'You are recovered?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'Well! understand then that I have always my key, the one you gave me, and which I hang round my neck to enrage the gentlemen of your chamber, who have only the right to hang it behind. Well! with this key we enter, and here I am.'

'By the secret door, then?'

'Eh! without doubt.'

'But why did you enter to-day, rather than yesterday?'

'Ah! it's true, there's the question. Well! you shall know it.'

Henry let his sheets drop, and with the simplicity of an infant,—

'Tell me nothing disagreeable, Chicot,' he said, 'I entreat you; oh! if you knew what pleasure the sound of your voice gives me!'

'As for me, I shall tell you the truth, that's all. If the truth is disagreeable, so much the worse.'

'It is not serious, is it, your fear of M. de Mayenne?' said the King.

'On the contrary, it is very serious. You understand, M. de Mayenne had given me fifty blows with a stick;

I took my revenge, and returned him a hundred with my sword sheath. Suppose two blows with the sword sheath are equal to one blow of a stick, and we are neck and neck. Beware of revenge ! Suppose one blow of a sword sheath to be equal to one blow of a stick, this perhaps is the opinion of M. de Mayenne, in that case he still owes me fifty blows with a stick or a sword sheath; but I fear nothing so much as debtors of this sort, and I would not have come here, however you may have wanted me, had I not known that M. de Mayenne was at Soissons.'

'Well, Chicot, this being the case, since it is on my account you have returned, I take you under my protection, and I will——'

'What will you ? take care, Henriquet; every time you pronounce the words, "I will," you are ready to say some foolish thing.'

'I would that you succeed, that you go out in open day.'

'There, I said right.'

'I will defend you.'

'Good !'

'Chicot, I pledge my royal word to you.'

'Bah ! I have better than that.'

'What have you ?'

'I have my hole, and I shall remain there.'

'I will defend you, I said,' exclaimed the King earnestly, seating himself on the bed step.

'Henry !' said Chicot, 'you will take cold, go into bed again, I beg of you.'

'You are right, but you exasperate me,' said the King, slipping between the sheets. 'How ! when I, Henri de Valois, King of France, have enough of Swiss, Scotch, French guards, and gentlemen for my defence, M. Chicot is not contented, and in safety !'

'Well, listen. How did you say ? you have Swiss ?'

'Yes, commanded by Tocquenot.'

'Good. You have Scotch ?'

'Yes, commanded by Larchant.'

'Very well; you have French guards ?'

'Commanded by Crillon.'

'Wonderful, and what next ?'

'What next ? I do not know if I ought to tell you this.'

'Do not tell it then; who asks you ?'

'And next, a novelty, Chicot.'

'A novelty ?'

'Yes, figure to yourself forty-five brave gentlemen.'

'Forty-five ! how do you say ?'

'Forty-five gentlemen.'

'Where did you find them ? Not at Paris, at any rate !'

'No, but they arrived yesterday at Paris.'

'Ouida ! Ouida' said Chicot, enlightened by a sudden idea; 'I know your gentlemen.'

'Really !'

'Forty-five beggars, who want nothing but their wallets.'

'I do not say so.'

'Figures that make one die with laughter.'

'Chicot, there are some superb men among them.'

'Gascons, in fact, like the colonel-general of your infantry.'

'And like you, Chicot.'

'Oh ! with me, Henry, it is very different; I am no longer a Gascon, since I quitted Gascony.'

'Whilst they ?'

'Are quite the contrary; they were not Gascons in Gascony, and here they are double Gascons.'

'Never mind, I have forty-five redoubtable swords.'

'Commanded by that forty-sixth redoubtable sword whom they call d'Epernon.'

'Not precisely.'

'And by whom ?'

'By Loignac.'

'Peuh !'

'Don't depreciate Loignac at present.'

'I will take good care of it, he is my cousin in the twenty-seventh degree.'

'You Gascons are all relations.'

'Quite the contrary to you Valois, who are never so.'

'Well, will you reply ?'

'To what ?'

'My forty-five ?'

'And 'tis with this you reckon on defending yourself ?'

'Yes, by the mordieu ! yes,' exclaimed Henry, irritated.

Chicot, or his spirit—for, not being better informed than the King on this point, we are obliged to leave our readers in doubt—Chicot, we say, had glided into the fauteuil, at the same time resting his heels on the rim of

the same fauteuil, so that his knees formed the summit of an angle more elevated than his head.

'Well !' he said, 'I have more troops than you.'

'Troops ! you have troops ?'

'And why not ?'

'And what troops ?'

'You shall see. In the first place, I have the whole army that MM. de Guise are forming in Lorraine.'

'Are you mad ?'

'No, a real army, six thousand men at the least.'

'But in what shape, I pray, will you, who have so great a dread of M. de Mayenne, get yourself defended precisely by the soldiers of M. de Guise ?'

'Because I am dead.'

'Again this jesting.'

'But it was with Chicot that M. de Mayenne fell out. I have therefore profited by this death to change the body, name, and social position.'

'Then you are no longer Chicot ?' said the King.

'No.'

'Who are you, then ?'

'I am Robert Briquet, formerly merchant and leaguer.'

'You leaguer, Chicot ?'

'Outrageous; one who acts, look you; but on condition of not too near a view of M. de Mayenne. I have for my personal defence, I, Briquet, member of the holy union, first the army of the Lorraines, these 6000 men. Recollect well the number.'

'I do.'

'Next, 100,000 Parisians, nearly.'

'Famous soldiers !'

'Famous enough to give you some trouble, my prince. Well, 100,000 and 6000, 106,000. Next, the Parliament, the Pope, the Spaniards, M. the Cardinal de Bourbon, the Flemish, Henry of Navarre, the Duke of Anjou.'

'Are you beginning to exhaust the list ?' said Henry; impatient.

'Why no, there still remains three sorts of gentry.'

'Mention them.'

'Who are much against you.'

'Mention them.'

'First, the Catholics.'

'Ah ! yes, because I have only exterminated but three parts of the Huguenots.'

'Then the Huguenots, because you have exterminated three parts of them.'

'Oh, yes; and the third sort?'

'What will you say to politicians, Henry?'

'Ah! those who will have neither me, nor my brother, nor M. de Guise.'

'But who would readily accept your brother-in-law of Navarre.'

'Provided he would abjure.'

'A pretty business! and how the matter gets entangled, doesn't it?'

'Ah ça! but the men of whom you speak——'

'Well?'

'Are the whole of France.'

'Exactly. There are my troops; mine, I who am a leaguer. Come, come, sum up and compare.'

'We are jesting, are we not, Chicot?' said Henry, feeling certain shudderings running through his veins.

'A pretty hour to jest, when you are alone against all the world, my poor Henry!'

Henry assumed an air of dignity quite royal.

'Alone I am,' he said; 'but alone, I will also command. You show me an army, very well; now show me a chief. Oh! you will point to M. de Guise; see you not that I hold him at Nancy? M. de Mayenne, you admit yourself that he is at Soissons; the Duke of Anjou, you know that he is at Brussels; the King of Navarre, he is at Pau; whilst I, I am alone, it is true, but free where I am, and seeing the approach of the enemy; as, in the middle of the plain, the hunter sees issue from the neighbouring wood his game, whether fur or feather.'

Chicot scratched his nose. The King considered him vanquished.

'What have you to reply to this?' said Henry.

'That you are always eloquent, Henry; you have still your speech; in truth it is more than I expected, and I compliment you very sincerely upon it. I shall but attack one part of your discourse.'

'Which?'

'Oh! mon Dieu! nothing, almost nothing, a figure of rhetoric; I shall attack comparison.'

'In what?'

'In that you pretend you are the hunter waiting for its game in its hiding-place, whilst I affirm that you are, on

the contrary, the game which the hunter tracks to its den.'

'Chicot !'

'Come, my man of the ambushade, who have you seen approach ? Say.'

'No one, pardieu.'

'But some one has approached.'

'Among those I have mentioned.'

'Not precisely, but nearly so.'

'And who is come ?'

'A woman.'

'My sister Margaret ?'

'No, the Duchess of Montpensier.'

'She at Paris ?'

'Eh ! mon Dieu ! yes.'

'Well ! if it be so, since when have I feared a woman ?'

"Tis true, we ought only to fear men. Wait a little then. She comes as an avant courier; do you hear ? she comes to announce the arrival of her brother.'

'The arrival of M. de Guise ?'

'Yes.'

'And you think this will embarrass me ?'

'Oh ! nothing embarrasses you.'

'Pass me the ink and paper.'

'What to do ? to sign an order for M. de Guise to remain at Nancy ?'

'Exactly ! the idea is good, since it occurred to you at the same time as to myself.'

'Execrable ! on the contrary.'

'Why ?'

'He will no sooner have received this order, than he will suppose his presence is necessary at Paris, and he will hasten there.'

The King felt his anger mounting to his forehead. He regarded Chicot sternly.

'If you are only returned to make me communications like these, you might well have remained where you were.'

'What do you wish, Henry ? Phantoms are not flatterers.'

'You confess then that you are but a spirit.'

'I have never denied it.'

'Chicot !'

'Come, don't be angry; for from being short-sighted

as you are, you will become blind. Let us see; did you not tell me you held your brother in Flanders ?'

'Yes, certainly, and I maintain it is good policy.'

'Now, listen, and do not let us quarrel. For what object do you suppose M. de Guise remains at Nancy ?'

'To organise an army there.'

'Good; let us proceed calmly. For what does he destine this army ?'

'Ah ! Chicot, you fatigue me with so many of your questions.'

'Fatigue you ! fatigue you ! Henry; you will repose better for it hereafter, 'tis I who promise it you. We were saying, then, that he destined this army——'

'To meet the Huguenots in the north.'

'Or rather to puzzle your brother of Anjou, who has had himself named Duke of Brabant; who is endeavouring to raise for himself a little throne in Flanders; and who is constantly demanding assistance from you to attain this object.'

'Assistance which I always promise him, but will never send him, be it understood.'

'To the great joy of M. de Guise. Well ! Henry, a little advice.'

'What may that be ?'

'If you feigned for once to send him this promised assistance; if this assistance advanced towards Brussels, did it only go half way ?'

'Ah ! yes, I understand,' exclaimed Henry; 'M. de Guise would not budge from the frontier.'

'And the promise that Madame de Montpensier has given us leaguers, that M. de Guise would be at Paris within a week ?'

'This promise would fall to the ground.'

'Tis you who say it, my master,' said Chicot, quite at his ease. 'Well, what do you think of the advice, Henry ?'

'I think it good, yet——'

'What more ?'

'Whilst these two gentlemen are occupied with each other, yonder, in the north.'

'Ah ! yes, the south, is it not ? you are right, Henry, 'tis from the south the storm comes.'

'During this time, will not my third plague put himself in motion. You know what the Bearnais is doing ?'

'No, the devil fetch me !'

'He reclaims.'

'What ?'

'The towns that form the dower of his wife——'

'Bah ! what an insolent, to whom the honour of being allied to the house of France is not enough, but dares to reclaim that which belongs to him !'

'Cahors, for example, as if it were good policy to abandon such a town to an enemy.'

'No, indeed, it would not be good policy, but it would be that of an honest man, for example.'

'Monsieur Chicot !'

'Let us fancy I have said nothing about it; you know that I do not interfere in family affairs.'

'But this does not disturb me; I have an idea.'

'Good.'

'Let us return to the most pressing.'

'To Flanders.'

'I shall send some one, then, to my brother in Flanders; but who shall I send ? in whom can I trust, mon Dieu ! for a mission of this importance ? Go you, Chicot.'

'Who ? I go to Flanders ?'

'Why not ?'

'A dead man go to Flanders ? Come, come !'

'But since you are no longer Chicot, being at present Robert Briquet.'

'Good, a bourgeois, a leaguer, a friend of M. de Guise. performing the functions of an ambassador to M. the Duke of Anjou.'

'You mean to refuse, then ?'

'Pardieu !'

'And to disobey me ?'

'I disobey you; is it I who owe you obedience ?'

'You do not owe me obedience, miserable ?'

'Have you ever given me anything that binds me to you ? The little I have, came to me by inheritance; I am beggarly and obscure. Make me duke and peer, raise to a marquisate my lands of Chicotrie, pension me with 500,000 crowns, and then we will talk of embassies.'

Henry was about to reply with one of those good reasons which kings always find when such reproaches are made them, when the massive velvet door was heard to creak on the curtain rod.

'Monsieur the Duke de Joyeuse !' said the huissier.

'Eh! ventre de biche! here is the man!' exclaimed Chicot. 'Find me an ambassador to represent you better than Messire Anne will do; I defy you!'

'Au fait,' murmured Henry, 'decidedly this devil of a man is a better adviser than any of my ministers.'

'Ah! you agree with me then?' said Chicot.

And he fell back in his fauteuil, taking the shape of a ball, in such a manner that the most skilful sailor, accustomed to distinguish the least speck beneath the horizon, would not have distinguished a line above the carving of the large fauteuil in which he was buried.

M. de Joyeuse might well be grand admiral of France, he saw no better than another.

The King uttered a cry of joy on perceiving his young favourite, and tendered him his hand.

'Seat yourself, Joyeuse, my child,' he said to him; 'mon Dieu! how late you are!'

'Sire,' replied Joyeuse, 'your Majesty is very obliging to notice it.'

And the duke, approaching the head of the bed, seated himself on the fleur-de-lise'd pillows on the steps of the estrade.

CHAPTER XV

THE DIFFICULTY OF A KING IN FINDING GOOD AMBASSADORS

Chicot still invisible in his fauteuil, Joyeuse reclining on the cushions, Henry huddled up in his bed, the conversation commenced.

'Well, Joyeuse,' demanded the King; 'have you well vagabondised through the city?'

'Why, yes, sire; very well, thank you,' carelessly replied the duke.

'How was it you disappeared so suddenly from the Grève?'

'Listen, sire, frankly; it was but little amusing; and besides, I do not like to see men suffer.'

'What a merciful heart!'

'No, a selfish heart; the sufferings of another affects my nerves.'

'You know what has passed.'

'Where, sire ?'

'En Grève.'

'My faith, no.'

'Salcède has denied.'

'Ah !'

'You take it very indifferently.'

'I ?'

'Yes.'

'I confess, sire, I do not consider it of much importance what he says; besides, I was sure he would recant.'

'But since he has confessed.'

'Another reason; the first admissions put the Guises on their guard; they laboured, whilst your Majesty remained inactive; it could not be otherwise.'

'How; you foresaw these things, and did not tell me ?'

'Am I minister, to talk about politics ?'

'Let us leave it, Joyeuse.'

'Sire !'

'I shall want your brother.'

'My brother, as well as myself, sire, is quite at the service of your Majesty.'

'I can, therefore, reckon upon him.'

'No doubt.'

'Well, I wish to charge him with a little commission.'

'Out of Paris ?'

'Yes.'

'In that case, impossible, sire.'

'How so ?'

'Du Bouchage cannot leave Paris at this moment.'

Henry raised himself on his elbow, and regarded Joyeuse with open eyes.

'What does that mean ?' he said.

Joyeuse supported the interrogating glance of the King with perfect serenity.

'Sire,' he said, 'tis the easiest thing in the world to understand. Du Bouchage is in love, but his amorous campaign was badly laid out; he took a false road, so that the poor child was wasting.'

'In fact,' said the King, 'I have remarked it.'

'And became sombre; sombre, mordieux! as though he had lived at the court of your Majesty.'

A peculiar grunt, issuing from the corner of the chimney, interrupted Joyeuse, who looked round him astonished.

'Pay no attention, Anne,' said Henry, laughing, 'tis some dog dreaming on the fauteuil. You were saying, then, my friend, that poor du Bouchage became gloomy.'

'Yes, sire, as gloomy as death; it appears he encountered a woman of a funereal humour. These encounters are terrible; at the same time, with this sort of character we succeed better than with over-gay women; it only requires to know how to manage them.'

'Eh! it would not have embarrassed you, libertine.'

'Ah, you call me libertine, because I love the women.'

Henry heaved a sigh.

'You say that this woman has a funereal character?'

'As du Bouchage pretends, at least; I do not know her.'

'And maugre this sadness, you will succeed?'

'Parbleu! it is only necessary to act by contrasts. I know of no difficulties, except with women of a middle temperament; these exact on the part of the besieger, a combination of graces and severity, which few persons succeed in combining. Du Bouchage, then, has fallen upon a sombre woman, and his love is gloomy.'

'Poor boy,' said the King.

'You understand, sire,' continued Joyeuse, 'that he no sooner placed his confidence in me, than I endeavoured to cure him.'

'So that——'

'So that at the present moment the cure commences.'

'He is already less amorous?'

'No, sire; but he has hopes that the woman will become more amorous; which is a more agreeable mode of curing individuals than destroying their love. From this evening, then, instead of sighing in unison with the lady, he will enliven her by every possible means; this evening, for example, I send to his mistress thirty Italian musicians, who will play outrageously under her balcony.'

'Fie,' said the King, 'tis vulgar.'

'Vulgar, is it? Thirty musicians who have not their equals in the whole world?'

'Ah, my faith! the devil! if, when I was amorous of Madame de Condé, they had distracted me with music!'

'Yes, sire, but you were in love.'

'As a madman,' said the King.

A fresh grunt was heard, which much resembled a sneer of raillery.

'You see plainly 'tis quite another thing, sire,' said Joyeuse, endeavouring, but in vain, to discover from whence came the interruption. 'The lady, on the contrary, is as indifferent as a statue, and as cold as an iceberg.'

'And you think the music will melt the ice, animate the statue?'

'Certainly, I think so.'

The King shook his head.

'I do not say,' continued Joyeuse, 'that at the first stroke of the fiddlestick the lady will throw herself into the arms of du Bouchage; no, but she will be touched at their making all this noise on her account; by degrees she will accustom herself to the concerts; and if she does not accustom herself, well! we shall have comedy, jugglers, enchantments, poetry, horses, every folly on earth, in fact, so that if the pretty lonely one does not resume her gaiety, she must at least return to du Bouchage.'

'I wish it to him,' said Henry; 'but let us leave du Bouchage, since it will be so inconvenient for him to leave Paris at this moment; it is not indispensable to me that he alone should accomplish this mission; but I hope you, who give such good advice, have not made yourself a slave, like him, to some pretty passion.'

'I!' exclaimed Joyeuse, 'I have never been so perfectly free in my life.'

'Wonderful! Then you have nothing to do?'

'Absolutely nothing, sire.'

'But I thought you were in relation with a fair lady?'

'Oh! yes, the mistress of M. de Mayenne; a woman who adores me.'

'Well?'

'Well! imagine to yourself that to-night, after giving du Bouchage his lesson, I left him to go to her; I arrive, my imagination warmed with the theories I had been developing; 'I swear to you, sire, I thought myself almost as amorous as Henry; but there I find a woman trembling, frightened; the first idea that occurred to me was that I had disturbed some one; I look round me, no one; I endeavour to calm her, in vain; I question, she does not reply; I attempt to kiss her, she turns her head, and as I frowned, she gets angry, rises, we quarrel, and she apprises me that she shall never be at home when I present myself.'

'Poor Joyeuse,' said the King, smiling; 'and how did you act?'

'Pardieu, sire, I took my sword and my cloak, I made her a grand salute, and I left without once turning my head.'

'Bravo, Joyeuse! very courageous,' said the King.

'Much more courageous, sire, as I fancied I heard the poor girl sigh.'

'Will you not repent of your stoicism?' said Henry.

'No, sire; if I had repented for one moment, I would have hastened there directly; you comprehend. But nothing will drive away the idea, that the poor girl quits me despite herself.'

'And yet you left?'

'I am here.'

'And you will not return there?'

'Never; if I had the stomach of M. de Mayenne, I do not say; but I am delicate, I have a right to be proud.'

'My friend,' said Henry seriously, 'tis lucky for your safety, this rupture.'

'I do not deny it, sire; but in the interim, I shall be cruelly bored for a week, having nothing to do, not knowing what to turn to; so that I have thought of being most deliciously idle. 'Tis amusing to get wearied, really.'

'I can well believe it,' said the King.

'Here is my plan, sire; I arranged it whilst returning from the square of Notre-Dame to the Louvre. I shall be carried here every day in a litter; your Majesty will say your orisons, I shall read books of chemistry or navigation, which will be much better as I am a sailor; I shall have some little dogs which I shall make play with yours, or rather some kittens, it will be more graceful; we will afterwards take some cream, and M. d'Epéron shall relate tales to us. I will fatten you also; and when the lady of du Bouchage shall become gay instead of sad, we will look out for another, who from being gay will turn sad; this will make a change; but all this, without budging, sire; we are only decidedly well when seated, and very well when in bed. Ah! the dear cushions, sire; it is plain that the upholsterers of your Majesty work for a king who is bored.'

'Fie, now, Anne,' said the King.

'Why so, sire?'

'A man of your age and rank to become idle and corpulent: what an ugly idea!'

'I do not think so, sire.'

'I will occupy you with something.'

'If it is wearisome, I should like it.'

A third grunt was heard; one would have said that the dog laughed at the words pronounced by Joyeuse.

'That dog is very intelligent,' said Henry; 'he guesses what I would have you do.'

'What would you have me do, sire? let us hear a little of it.'

'You must put on your boots.'

Joyeuse made a movement as though alarmed.

'Oh! no, do not demand that of me, sire, 'tis against all my ideas.'

'You must mount your horse.'

Joyeuse started.

'On horseback! no, I go no more except in a litter. Your Majesty did not hear then?'

'Come, Joyeuse, a truce to jesting, you hear me, you must boot yourself and mount your horse.'

'No, sire,' replied the duke, with the greatest seriousness, 'tis impossible.'

'And why so; impossible?' demanded Henry angrily.

'Because, because—I am an admiral.'

'Well?'

'And admirals do not ride on horseback.'

'Ah! that's it, is it?' said Henry.

Joyeuse replied by one of those signs of the head, like children when they are too obstinate to obey, too timid to reply.

'Well! be it so, Monsieur the Admiral of France; you shall not go on horseback, you are right, it is not the state of an admiral to mount on horseback; but the state of a sailor is to go in boats or galleys; you will therefore immediately repair to Rouen in your ship; at Rouen you will find your admiral's galley; you will immediately go on board, and you will shape your course for Antwerp.'

'For Antwerp!' exclaimed Joyeuse, as much in despair as if he had received orders to depart for Canton or Valparaiso.

'I believe I said so,' replied the King, in a freezing tone, which established without further dispute his right as

chief, and his will as sovereign; 'I believe I have said so, and I do not mean to repeat it.'

Joyeuse, without exhibiting the slightest resistance, buttoned his cloak, placed his sword under his arm, and took his velvet cap from off the fauteuil.

'What trouble to get obeyed,' grumbled Henry; 'if I sometimes forget that I am master, every one, at least, except myself, ought to remember it.'

Joyeuse, mute and stately, bowed; and in accordance with etiquette, placed his hand on the guard of his sword.

'The orders, sire,' he said in a voice, which, by its submissive accent, immediately changed to melting wax the will of the monarch.

'You will repair to Rouen,' he said to him, 'where I desire that you embark, unless you prefer to go to Brussels by land.'

Henry expected a reply from Joyeuse, the latter contented himself with a salute.

'Do you prefer the route by land?' demanded Henry.

'I have no preference when it concerns the execution of an order, sire,' replied Joyeuse.

'Ah! sulky, well sulk—frightful temper,' exclaimed Henry. 'Ah! kings have no friends!'

'He who gives orders can only expect to be obeyed,' replied Joyeuse, with solemnity.

'Monsieur,' replied the wounded king, 'you will go then to Rouen; you will mount your galley; you will inspect the garrisons of Candebec, Harfleur, and Dieppe, which I shall strengthen; you will charge six vessels for them, which you will place at the service of my brother, who is waiting for the assistance I have promised him.'

'My commission, if you please, sire,' said Joyeuse.

'And since when is it that you have declined to act in virtue of your powers as an admiral?' said the King.

'I have only the right to obey; and as far as I can, sir, I avoid all responsibility.'

'Tis well, Monsieur the Duke; you will receive the commission at your hotel the moment of your departure.'

'And when will this moment be, sire?'

'In one hour.'

Joyeuse bowed respectfully, and turned towards the door.

The heart of the King was near breaking.

'What,' said he, 'not even the politeness of an adieu ! Monsieur the Admiral, you are not over civil; 'tis a reproach generally made of the gentlemen of the sea. Well, well ! perhaps I may have more satisfaction from my colonel-general of infantry.'

'Deign to pardon me, sire,' stammered Joyeuse, 'but I am a worse courtier than I am a sailor, and I am thinking your Majesty regrets what you have done for me.'

And he left, closing the door with violence, behind the tapestry, which became inflated by the repulsion of the wind.

'See, then, how those love me for whom I have done so much !' exclaimed the King. 'Ah ! Joyeuse ! ungrateful Joyeuse !'

'Well ! will you not recall him ?' said Chicot, advancing towards the bed. 'What ! because you have exerted a little power, by chance you repent of it.'

'Listen, then,' replied the King, 'you are charming; do you think it agreeable to receive in the month of October, the wind and rain from the sea ? I would I could see you there, egotist.'

'Free to you, grand King, free to you.'

'To see you by roads and valleys.'

'By roads or no roads, 'tis my most ardent wish at this moment to travel.'

'And if I sent you anywhere, as I have Joyeuse, you would accept ?'

'Not only would I accept, but I implore it, I entreat it.'

'A mission ?'

'A mission.'

'You will go to Navarre ?'

'I will go to the devil, great King.'

'Are you jesting, buffoon ?'

'Sire, I was not over gay during my lifetime, and I swear to you, that I am much more out of spirits since my death.'

'But you refused just now to quit Paris ?'

'My gracious sovereign, I was wrong, very wrong, and I repent it.'

'So that you now wish to quit Paris ?'

'Directly, illustrious King; this very moment, great monarch.'

'I comprehend no longer,' said Henry

'You did not hear the words of the grand admiral of France then ?'

'Which.'

'Those in which he announced to you his rupture with the mistress of M. de Mayenne.'

'Yes; well, what then ?'

'If this woman, in love with a charming youth like the duke, for Joyeuse is charming——'

'Undoubtedly.'

'If this woman dismisses him with a sigh, she has some motive for it.'

'Probably, without that she would not have dismissed him.'

'Well, this motive, do you know it ?'

'No.'

'You do not guess it.'

'No.'

'Tis that M. de Mayenne will return.'

'Oh, oh !' said the King.

'You comprehend at last; I congratulate you on it.'

'Yes, I comprehend; but yet——'

'But yet.'

'I do not think your reason very substantial.'

'Give me yours, Henry; I wish for no better than to find them excellent.'

'Why did not this woman break with Mayenne, instead of dismissing Joyeuse ? Think you not, that Joyeuse would willingly have accompanied M. de Mayenne to the Pre aux Clercs and made a hole through his great belly ? The sword of our Joyeuse is a naughty one.'

'Very well; but M. de Mayenne has a treacherous poniard, if Joyeuse has a naughty sword. Do you remember Saint Megrin ?' Henry heaved a sigh, and raised his eyes to heaven. 'The woman who really loves has no great relish to see her lover killed, she prefers to quit him, gain time; she prefers especially to preserve her own life. That dear house of Guise is most diabolically brutal.'

'Ah ! you may be right.'

'It's very lucky.'

'Yes, and I begin to think Mayenne will return; but you, you Chicot, you are not a fearful or amorous woman.'

'I ! Henry; I am a prudent man, a man who has an

open account with M. de Mayenne, a party engaged; if he finds me he will recommence. This good M. de Mayenne is a gambler we may well tremble at.'

'Well?'

'Well! he will play so well, that I shall receive a gentle probe with a poniard.'

'Bah! I know my Chicot, he will not receive without paying.'

'You are right, I will pay him a dozen that shall end him.'

'So much the better, the game would then be up.'

'So much the worse, morbleu! on the contrary, so much the worse; the family would cry loud enough, you would have the whole league upon you; and some fine morning you would say to me: "Chicot, my friend, excuse me, but I am obliged to have you broken on the wheel."'

'I shall say that?'

'You will say that, and what is much worse even, you would do it, great King. I would rather that the matter was the other way, do you comprehend? I am not badly off as I am, and I should wish to remain so. Look you, all these arithmetical progressions towards rancour, appear to me dangerous; I will therefore go to Navarre, if you will be good enough to send me.'

'Without doubt, I will send you.'

'I wait the orders, gracious prince.'

And Chicot, taking the same position as Joyeuse, attended.

'But,' said the King, 'you do not know if the mission will be agreeable to you.'

'From the moment I requested it of you.'

'Tis, you see, Chicot,' said Henry, 'that I have certain projects for a quarrel between Margaret and her husband.'

'Divide and reign,' said Chicot; 'this has been, for the last century, the A B C of politics.'

'So that you have no repugnance?'

'Is that my business?' replied Chicot; 'you will do as you like, great prince. I am ambassador, that's all; you have no account to render me, and provided I am inviolable—oh! as to that, you understand, I stick to it.'

'But still,' said Henry, 'you must know what you will say to my brother-in-law.'

'I say something ! no, no, no !'

'What, no, no, no ?'

'I will go where you like, but I will say nothing at all. There is a proverb about that. Scratch too much——'

'Then you refuse ?'

'I refuse the message, but I accept the letter. He who carries a message has always some responsibility; he who presents a letter, gets only a second-hand bullying.'

'Well ! be it so. I will give you a letter; that is a part of my policy.'

'Only see how it turns out; give.'

'What do you say ?'

'I say, give.'

And Chicot tendered his hand.

'Ah ! don't imagine that a letter like this can be written in a moment; it requires reflection, combination, weight.'

'Well, weigh, reflect, combine; I will return to-morrow morning at daybreak, then I will take it.'

'Why will you not sleep here ?'

'Here ?'

'Yes, in your fauteuil.'

'Peste ! 'tis over; I shall sleep no more at the Louvre—a phantom seen sleeping in a fauteuil, what an absurdity !'

'But still,' said the King, 'I should wish you to know my intentions with regard to Margaret and her husband. You are a Gascon; my letter will make a noise at the court of Navarre. They will question you; you must be in a position to reply. What the devil ! you represent me; I should not wish you to look like a fool.'

'Mon Dieu !' said Chicot, raising his shoulders; 'what an obtuse mind you have, great King; you fancy I am going to carry a letter two hundred and fifty leagues, without knowing its contents ! But be easy; ventre de biche ! at the corner of the first street, under the first tree I meet with, I shall open your letter. What ! for the last ten years you have sent ambassadors to all parts of the world, and you know no better than that ! Come ! put your body and soul to sleep, I will return to my solitude.'

'Where is your solitude ?'

'At the cemetery of the Grand Innocens, great prince.' Henry regarded Chicot with that astonishment which

he had not been enabled, for the last two hours he had been in his company, to drive from his looks.

'You did not expect him at all, did you?' said Chicot, taking his cap and cloak; 'this is what it is to have correspondence with gentry in the other world. 'Tis agreed; to-morrow, I or my messenger.'

'Be it so; but your messenger must have a password, that it may be known he comes from you and that the doors may be opened to him.'

'Wonderful! if it is myself, I shall come on my own part; if it is my messenger, he will come on the part of the ghost.'

And at these words, he disappeared so gently, that the superstitious mind of Henry doubted if it were really a body or a spirit who had passed through the door without making it creak, under the drapery, without agitating one of its folds.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW, AND FOR WHAT REASON CHICOT HAD DIED

CHICOT, a substantial body—let it not displease those of our readers who are such partisans of the marvellous as to think we should have the audacity to introduce a ghost into our history—Chicot had departed, then, after having told the King, in his usual way, under the form of raillery, all the truths he had to say to him.

The circumstances were these:—

After the death of the King's friends, and since the troubles and conspiracies fomented by the Guises, Chicot had reflected, Brave and careless, he still had a great desire for life, which amused him. They are but fools who, wearied with this life, plunge, to seek distraction, into the other.

The result of his reflections was, that the vengeance of M. de Mayenne appeared to him more redoubtable, than the protection of the King was efficacious; and he said to himself, with that practical philosophy which characterised him, that in this world nothing that is actually done, can be undone; and therefore that all the halberds, and all the courts of justice of the King of France, could not repair a certain opening which the

poniard of M. de Mayenne would have made in the doublet of Chicot.

He had therefore taken his part, like a man wearied with the part of a jester, which at every moment he burned to change to a part more serious; and with the familiarities of royalty which, in these times, were leading him straight to his ruin.

Chicot began, then, by placing between the sword of M. de Mayenne and his own skin, the greatest possible distance. For this purpose, he departed for Beaume, in the threefold view of quitting Paris, embracing his friend Gorenflot, and tasting the famous wine of 1550, which had been so warmly treated of in that famous letter which terminates our narrative of la Dame de Monsoreau.

The consolation was efficacious; at the end of two months. Chicot remarked that he was evidently much fatter, and that this would serve him to disguise himself; but he also discovered that in getting fat he had also got greatly attached to Gorenflot, more so than was consistent in a man of talent. The mind therefore prevailed over matter, after Chicot had drank some hundred bottles of the famous wine of 1550, and devoured the twenty-two volumes which composed the library of the priory, and in which the prior had read this Latin axiom: *Bonum vinum lætificat cor hominis*. Chicot felt a great weight about the stomach, and a great emptiness in the brain.

'I would willingly become a friar,' he thought, 'but, dear Gorenflot, I should be too much the master, and in another abbey, I should not be sufficiently so. Certainly the gown would disguise me for ever to the eyes of M. de Mayenne; but by all the devils! there are other means besides the vulgar ones; let us search. I have read in another work, it is true, but this one is not in the library of Gorenflot, *Quare et invenies*.'

Chicot searched then, and this is what he found. For the time it was novel enough.

He unburdened himself to Gorenflot, and begged him to write to the King under his dictation.

Gorenflot, it is true, wrote with difficulty, but at length he wrote that Chicot had retired to the priory; that the grief for having been obliged to separate himself from his master, when the latter had become reconciled with

M. de Mayenne, had undermined his health; that he had made an effort to struggle, by seeking amusement, but that the sacrifice was too strong for him, and that at length he had sank.

On his part, Chicot had himself written to the King; the letter, dated in the year 1580, is divided into five paragraphs.

Each of these paragraphs was reputed to have been written at a day's interval, and according as the disease progressed.

The first paragraph was written and signed with a firm bold hand.

The second was traced with a steady hand; but the signature, though still readable, was already very trembling.

He had written *Chic*— at the end of the third.

Ch— at the end of the fourth.

Lastly he had made a *C*. with a blot at the conclusion of the fifth.

This blot of a dying man had produced on the King the most painful effect.

This explains why he had looked upon Chicot as a phantom and spirit.

We would readily insert here the letter of Chicot, but Chicot was an eccentric man, as they say; and as the style is the man, his epistolary style especially was so eccentric, that we dare not reproduce the letter here, whatever effect we might expect from it. But it will be found in the *Mémoires de l'Etoile*, and is dated in 1580.

At the foot of this letter, and that the interest of the King might not be allowed to sleep, Gorenflot added that since the death of his friend, the priory of Beaume was become odious to him, and that he liked Paris better.

This postscript had been drawn from Gorenflot with much trouble by his friend Chicot. For Gorenflot, on the contrary, found himself particularly well off at Beaume and Panurge too. He piteously observed to Chicot that the wine is always adulterated when we are not present to choose it on the spot. But Chicot promised the worthy prior, to come in person every year, make his provision of Romanee, Volnay, and Chambertin, and as on this point Gorenflot acknowledged the superiority of Chicot, he finished by yielding to the solicitations of his friend.

In reply to the letter from Gorenflot, and to the last adieus of Chicot, the King had written with his own hand :—

‘MONSIEUR THE PRIOR,—You will give a holy and poetic sepulchre to poor Chicot, whom I regret with all my soul, for he was not only a devoted friend, but also a very good gentleman, although he could never get a sight of himself in his genealogy beyond his great-great-grandfather. You will surround him with flowers, and arrange that he may repose in the sun, in which he delighted, being from the south. As to yourself, whom I honour, the more for the grief I share with you, you shall quit, as you desire, the Priory of Beaume. I have too much need at Paris of devoted men and good clerks to keep you at a distance. In consequence, I name you prior of the Jacobins, your residence being fixed near the gate of Saint Antoine, at Paris; a quarter which our poor friend was particularly attached to.

‘Your affectionate

‘HENRY,

‘who prays you not to forget him
‘in your holy prayers.’

Let us imagine whether such a letter, written entirely by the royal hand, made the prior stare; whether he admired the powerful genius of Chicot, and whether he hastened to take his flight towards the honours that awaited him.

For ambition had already planted one of its clinging roots in the heart of Gorenflot—of Gorenflot, whose prenomens had always been *Modeste*, and who, since he had been prior of Beaume, called himself Dom Modeste Gorenflot.

All had, at once, passed to the satisfaction of the King and of Chicot. A fagot of thorns intended to represent physically and allegorically the body of Chicot, had been interred in the sunny side, in the midst of flowers, under a handsome vine tree; and once dead and buried in effigy, Chicot assisted Gorenflot in his removal.

Dom Modeste was then installed in grand pomp at the priory of the Jacobins. Chicot chose the night to glide into Paris. He had purchased near the gate Bussy a small house, which cost him three hundred crowns; and when he wished to see Gorenflot, he had three routes; that of

the town, which was the shortest; that along the banks of the river, which was the most poetical; and lastly, that which ran along the walls of Paris, and which was the safest.

But Chicot, who was thoughtful and pensive, generally chose that of the Seine; and as at this time the tide was not enclosed within walls of stone, the water, as the poet says, came lapping over its wide beach, along which, more than once, the inhabitants of the city might have seen the long shadow of Chicot lengthen itself in the clear moonlight.

Having installed himself and changed his name, Chicot studied how to change his face; he called himself Robert Briquet, as we are aware of, and walked with a slight bend forward; then the excitement and vicissitudes of five or six years had rendered him nearly bald, so much so that his former hair, black and crisp, had, like the return of the tide, retired from the front to the back.

Besides, as we have said, he worked at that art, dear to ancient mimics, which consisted in changing, by knowing contractions, the natural play of the muscles, and the usual play of the physiognomy. It resulted from this assiduous study, that seen, in open day, Chicot, when he chose to give himself the trouble, was a veritable Robert Briquet, that is, a man whose mouth reached from ear to ear, whose nose touched his chin, and whose eyes squinted enough to frighten one; all without grimace, but not without charms for the amateurs of change, since from being fine, long, and angular, his figure had become large, cheerful, obtuse, and neat.

Chicot had but his long arms and legs which he could not shorten; but as he was very industrious, he had, as we have observed, arched his back, which made his arms nearly as long as his legs.

To these physiognomical exercises, he joined the precaution of attaching himself to no one. In fact, dislocated as Chicot was, he could not for ever preserve the same posture. How appear hunchbacked at noon, when he had been straight at ten o'clock; and what excuse could be made to a friend who sees you suddenly change the figure, because, in walking together, you meet by chance a suspicious face?

Robert Briquet, therefore, led the life of a recluse. Besides it suited his taste; his only distraction was to

visit Gorenflot, and with him finish the famous wine of 1550, which the worthy prior had taken good care to remove from the cellars of Beaume.

But vulgar spirits are liable to changes as well as higher ones; Gorenflot changed, not physically, thank God! but morally.

He beheld, in his power and his discretion, the individual who until then had held his destinies in his hand. Chicot, coming to dine at the priory, appeared in his view as Chicot enslaved; and Gorenflot from this moment thought too much of himself, and not enough of Chicot.

The latter observed, without being offended, the change in his friend; those he had experienced from the King had inured him to this sort of philosophy; he was the more cautious, that was all. Instead of going every other day to the priory, he now only went once a week, then once a fortnight, and at length once a month only. Gorenflot was so inflated that he did not notice it.

Chicot was too much of a philosopher to be sensitive; he laughed in his sleeve at the ingratitude of Gorenflot, and scratched his nose and chin as usual.

'Water and time,' said he, 'are the two most powerful dissolvents I know of: the one melts the hardest stone; the other, pride. Let us wait.' And he waited.

He was in this position, when the events we have narrated took place, and in the midst of which there seemed to him to rise, some of those new elements which foretell great political catastrophes. But as his King, whom he still loved, appeared to him, in the coming events, to run some dangers analogous to those from which he had already preserved him, he resolved to appear to him as a spirit, and with this sole object, to show him the future. We have seen how the announcement of the near arrival of M. de Mayenne (an announcement involved in the sending away of Joyeuse, and which Chicot, with his crafty intelligence, had sought in the depth of his envelope) had made Chicot pass from the condition of a phantom, to the condition of a living man, and from the position of a prophet to that of an ambassador.

And now that all which might have appeared obscure in our narrative is explained, we shall recommence with Chicot, if our readers will permit us, and follow him from his egress from the Louvre to his little house at the Bussy crossing.

CHAPTER XVII

THE SERENADE

To reach his own house after leaving the Louvre, Chicot had not far to go.

He descended to the beach, and began to traverse the Seine in a small boat, which he managed by himself, and which, from the shores of Nesle, he had brought and anchored at the deserted quay of the Louvre.

'Tis strange,' he said to himself, while rowing, and at the same time regarding the windows of the palace, of which one alone, that of the chamber of the King, remained lighted, despite the advanced hour of the night, 'tis strange, after so many years, Henry is still the same; some have risen, others have fallen, some have died, he has gained a few wrinkles on his brow and in his heart, no more; 'tis eternally the same feeble and distinguished mind, fantastic and poetic; 'tis eternally the same selfish spirit, always demanding more than we can give him—friendship for indifference—love for friendship—devotedness for love; and, unhappy king, poor king, sad, with all this, more than any man in the kingdom. In truth, there is no one but myself, I think, who has probed this singular compound of debauchery and repentance, impiety and superstition; as there are none like myself who know the Louvre in its corridors, from which so many favourites have passed to exile or forgetfulness; as there are none like me who handle without danger, and play with that crown which burns the imagination of so many men whilst waiting for it to burn their fingers.'

Chicot heaved a sigh, more philosophical than sad, and applied himself vigorously to his oars.

'By the way,' he said suddenly, 'the King spoke not a word to me about the expenses of the journey; this confidence does me honour, as it proves that I am still his friend.'

And Chicot began laughing silently, and, by another pull at the oar, drove his boat upon the soft sands, where it remained embedded.

He then attached the prow to a stake by a knot of which he had the secret, and which in these innocent

times, we speak by comparison, was a sufficient security, he directed his steps towards his residence, situated scarcely two gun shots from the bank of the river.

On entering the Rue des Augustins, he was greatly astonished at hearing the sound of instruments and voices, which filled the neighbourhood with harmony, in general so peaceful at these advanced hours.

'There is a marriage hereabouts,' he thought at first, 'ventre de biche ! I have but five hours to sleep, and I shall be obliged to keep awake; I, who do not intend to marry.'

On approaching, he observed a grand light playing against the windows of the scattered houses which peopled his street; this light was produced by a dozen torches held by pages and footmen, whilst the twenty-four musicians, under the orders of a frantic Italian, made the night hideous with their violins, psalters, cistres, rebecs, bass viols, trumpets, and drums.

This noisy army was placed in good order before a house, which Chicot, not without surprise, recognised as his own.

The invisible general, who had directed this manoeuvre, had so arranged the musicians and pages, that the whole, with their faces turned towards the residence of Robert Briquet, their eyes fixed upon the windows, seemed neither to breathe, nor live, nor move, but in this contemplation.

Chicot remained a moment stupefied in regarding this evolution, and listening to this hubbub, and striking his thighs with his bony hands :—

'Why,' said he, 'there is a mistake; it is impossible they are making such a noise on my account.'

And approaching nearer, he mingled with the curious whom the serenade had collected; and looking attentively round him, he convinced himself that the light from the torches was reflected upon his house, as all the harmony was directed towards it; and as none amongst the crowd took any notice of the house opposite, or those by the side.

'Really,' said Chicot to himself, "'tis for me; is it that some unknown princess has fallen in love with me by chance ?'

This supposition, however flattering, did not appear to convince Chicot.

He turned round towards the house opposite to his own.

The two windows of this house, on the second floor,

the only ones that had no blinds, received at intervals some flashes from the torches; but it was for its own pleasure, poor house, which seemed deprived of life, bewidowed of any human face.

'They must sleep soundly in that house,' said Chicot; '*ventre de biche!* such a bacchanal would awaken the dead.'

During all these questions and answers which Chicot made to himself, the orchestra continued its symphonies as if playing before an assembly of kings and emperors.

'Pardon, my friend,' said Chicot, addressing himself to a torch-bearer, 'but can you tell me, if you please, for whom all this music is intended?'

'For the bourgeois who resides there,' replied the valet, at the same time pointing to the house of Robert Briquet.

'For me?' resumed Chicot; 'decidedly 'tis for me.'

Chicot cut through the crowd to read the explanation of the enigma on the sleeves and bosoms of the pages; but all heraldry had disappeared under a species of wall-coloured tabard.

'To whom do you belong, my friend?' demanded Chicot of a tamborine, who was warming his fingers with his breath, having no part to play at this moment.

'To the bourgeois who lives here,' replied the instrumentalist, pointing with his switch to the lodge of Robert Briquet.

'Ah! ah!' said Robert, 'they are not only for me, but they are mine. Better and better—at length we shall see something.'

And arming his face with the most complicated grimace he could assume, he elbowed the pages right and left, lackeys and musicians, to reach the door—a manoeuvre he did not accomplish without difficulty; and there, visible and resplendent in the circle formed by the torch-bearers, he drew the key from his pocket, opened the door, entered, closed the door, and then the blinds.

Ascending to his balcony, he brought a leather chair and placed it in the projection, comfortably installed himself in it, his chin resting on the rail; and there without seeming to observe the laughter which welcomed his apparition,—

'Messieurs,' he said, 'do you not make a mistake; and are your belles, cadences, and roulades really addressed to me?'

'You are Maître Robert Briquet?' asked the director of the orchestra.

'In person.'

'Well, we are quite at your service, sir,' replied the Italian, with a movement of his baton, which raised a fresh burst of melody.

'Decidedly it is unintelligible,' said Chicot, glancing with his sharp eyes over the whole crowd and the neighbouring houses.

All the inhabitants of the houses were at the windows, on the steps of the door, or mixed with the groups stationed before the door.

Maître Fournichon, his wife, and the whole forty-five women, children, and lackeys, peopled the openings of the Sword of the Proud Chevalier.

The opposite house alone was sombre—silent as the tomb.

Chicot endeavoured to discover by his eyes the solution of this puzzling enigma, when, suddenly, he fancied he saw, under the very awning of his house, through the chinks of the balcony floor, a little beneath his feet, a man completely enveloped in a dark-coloured cloak, wearing a black hat, with an orange plume, and a long sword; who, thinking himself unnoticed, regarded with all his strength the opposite house—that house, deserted, silent, and dead.

From time to time the leader of the orchestra quitted his post to speak to this man.

Chicot quickly guessed, that the whole interest of the scene lay there, and that this black hat concealed the face of a gentleman.

His attention was now confined to this person; the rôle of an observer was easy to him, his position on the rail of the balcony allowed him to distinguish amongst the crowd, and even under the awning; he succeeded, therefore, in following every movement of the mysterious stranger, whose first imprudence would not fail of discovering his features.

Suddenly, and whilst Chicot was wholly absorbed in his observations, a cavalier, followed by two equerries, appeared at the corner of the street, and hastily drove away with his switch, those who persisted in pressing too close upon the musicians.

'Monsieur Joyeuse,' murmured Chicot, who recognised

in the cavalier the grand admiral of France, booted and spurred, by order of the King.

The curious dispersed, the orchestra was silent; probably a sign from the master had imposed a cessation of the music.

The cavalier approached the gentleman concealed under the awning.

'Well! Henry,' he said, 'what news?'

'None, my brother.'

'Nothing!'

'No, she has not even appeared.'

'These rascals have not made noise enough?'

'They have deafened the whole neighbourhood.'

'They have not cried then, as they were instructed, that they played in honour of this bourgeois?'

'They cried so well, that he is there in person, in his balcony, listening to the serenade.'

'And she has not appeared?'

'Neither she, nor any one.'

'The idea, however, was ingenious,' said Joyeuse, piqued; 'for she might indeed, without compromising herself, do as these worthy people, and profit by the music given to her neighbours.'

Henry shook his head.

'Ah! it is plain-you do not know her, my brother,' he said.

'Yes, yes, I know her; that is, I know all women, and as she is comprised in the number, why, we will not be discouraged.'

'Oh! mon Dieu! brother, you say that in a very discouraging tone.'

'Not the least in the world; but from to-day, every evening the bourgeois must have his serenade.'

'But she will remove.'

'Why? if you say nothing, if you do not allude to her, if you always remain concealed? Did the bourgeois say anything when they offered him this gallantry?'

'He harangued the orchestra. And, stay, brother, see, he is going to speak again.'

In fact Briquet, decided upon bringing the affair to light, rose to interrogate a second time the leader of the band.

'Hold your tongue, above there, and retire,' cried Anne, in a bad humour; 'the devil! as you have had your

serenade, you have nothing to say, keep yourself quiet then.'

'My serenade, my serenade!' replied Chicot, in the most gracious manner; 'I should wish to know at least to whom my serenade is addressed.'

'To your daughter, imbecile.'

'Pardon, sir, but I have no daughter.'

'To your wife, then.'

'Thank God! I am not married.'

'Well, then, to yourself, yourself in person. Yes, to yourself, and if you do not retire——'

Joyeuse suiting the action to the words, forced his horse towards the balcony, and this through the band of instrumentalists.

'Ventre de biche!' cried Chicot, 'if the music is for me, who dares to crush my music?'

'You old fool,' grumbled Joyeuse, raising his head, 'if you do not hide your ugly carcass in your vulture's nest, the musicians shall break their instruments about your head.'

'Leave the poor man alone, my brother,' said du Bouchage; 'the fact is, that he must certainly be very much astonished.'

'And why should he be astonished, morbleau! besides, you can see that in getting up a quarrel, we shall attract some one to the window. Let us roast the bourgeois then—burn his house, if that is all; but, corbleau, let us agitate let us agitate!'

'For pity's sake, my brother,' said Henry, 'let us not force the attention of this woman—we are beaten—let us retreat.'

Briquet had not lost a word of this last dialogue, which had introduced a great light among his hitherto confused ideas; he, therefore, mentally made his preparations of defence, knowing the humour of the individual who attacked him.

But Joyeuse, yielding to his brother's reasons, no longer insisted. He dismissed the pages, valets, musicians, and leader.

Then drawing his brother aside:—

'You see me in despair,' he said; 'everything conspires against us.'

'What do you mean?'

'I have not the time to assist you.'

'Indeed you are in travelling costume; I had not yet observed it.'

'I depart this night for Antwerp, with a mission from the King.'

'When did he give it you then ?'

'To-night.'

'Mon Dieu !'

'Come with me, I entreat you.'

Henry let his arms drop.

'Do you order me, my brother ?' he inquired, becoming pale at the idea of leaving.

Anne made a movement.

'If you order,' continued Henry, 'I shall obey.'

'I only entreat you, du Bouchage, nothing more.'

'Thank you, my brother.'

Joyeuse shrugged his shoulders.

'Just as you like, Joyeuse; but you see, if I must renounce passing my nights in this street, if I cease regarding these windows——'

'Well ?'

'I shall die !'

'Poor fool !'

'My heart is there, you see, brother,' said Henry, stretching his hand towards the house; 'my life is there; do not ask me to live if you tear my heart from my bosom.'

The duke crossed his arms with a rage mingled with pity, bit his neat moustache, and after reflecting for a few moments——

'If your father begged of you, Henry,' he said, 'to allow yourself to be attended by Miron, who is a philosopher as well as a physician ?'

'I would reply to our father, that I am not ill, that my head is sound, and that Miron does not heal the love sick.'

'We must adopt your mode of looking at it then, Henry; but why should I disturb myself ? This female is a woman; you are persevering, there is nothing to despair of, and on my return I shall see you lighter, more jovial, and more gladsome than myself.'

'Yes, yes, my good brother,' replied the young man, pressing the hand of his friend; 'yes, I shall recover—yes, I shall be happy—yes, I shall be light-hearted;

thank you for your kindness, thank you ; 'tis my most precious jewel.'

'Next to your love ?'

'Before my life.'

Joyeuse, deeply moved, despite his apparent frivolity, suddenly interrupted his brother.

'Let us go,' said he, 'the torches are extinguished, the instruments on the backs of the musicians, the pages *en route*.'

'Go, go, my brother, I follow you,' said du Bouchage, sighing on quitting the street.

'I hear you,' said Joyeuse; 'the last adieu to the deserted window—'tis but just; and another adieu for me, Henry.'

Henry passed his arms round the neck of his brother, who stooped to embrace him.

'No,' he said, 'I will accompany you to the gates : but wait for me a hundred paces from hence. Thinking the street solitary, she may perhaps show herself.'

Anne rode his horse towards the escort, at a short distance. 'Well, we have no further occasion for you until fresh orders. Go.'

The torches disappeared; the conversation of the musicians, and the laughter of the pages finished; as well as the last dying groans from the chords of the violins and lutes, touched by some wandering minstrel.

Henry gave a last look at the house, sent a last prayer to the windows, and slowly rejoined, constantly looking back, his brother who preceded the two equerries.

Robert Briquet, seeing the two young men depart with the musicians, judged that the *dénouement* of the scene, if the scene was to have a *dénouement*, was about to follow.

In consequence, he retired noisily from the balcony, and closed the window.

Some idlers still remained firm at their post; but in about ten minutes the most persevering had disappeared.

In the meantime, Robert Briquet had gained the roof of his house, indented like one of the Flemish houses, and concealing himself behind one of these indentations, he observed the windows opposite.

As soon as the noise in the street had ceased, and neither instruments, footsteps, nor voices, were heard; as soon, in fact, as everything had returned to its accustomed order, one of the top windows of the strange house

was mysteriously opened, and a prudent head was advanced outside.

'Nothing more,' murmured the voice of a man, 'consequently no danger; it was some mystification addressed to our neighbour; you can quit your hiding place, madame, and redescend to your own rooms.'

At these words the man closed the window, struck a light with a flint, and lighted a lamp, which he handed towards an arm stretched out to receive it.

Chicot observed with all the strength of his powers of vision.

But he had no sooner perceived the pale and sublime figure of the woman who received the lamp; he had no sooner caught the mild, but sorrowful look exchanged between the attendant and the mistress, than he himself turned pale, and felt a freezing shudder run through his veins.

The young woman was scarcely twenty-four years of age; she descended the stairs; her attendant followed her.

'Ah!' murmured Chicot, passing his hand across his forehead to wipe away the perspiration, and as though chasing away, at the same time, some terrible vision; 'ah! Count du Bouchage, brave and handsome fellow, outrageously in love, who now talks of being joyful, gladsome, and light-hearted, pass your device to your brother, for never more will you say, *hilariter!*'¹

He then descended to his room, his brow clouded as though he had fallen into some terrible scene that had passed—some dreadful abyss—and had sat down in the shade, subdued: he, the last, but the most completely perhaps, by the most incredible influence of melancholy, which sent forth its rays from the centre of this house.

CHAPTER XVIII

CHICOT'S PURSE

CHICOT passed the whole night dreaming in his fauteuil. Dreaming is the word, for, in reality, he was occupied less in thought than in dreams.

To return to the past, to see flashing before our eyes;

¹ 'Joyously,' the device of Henri de Joyeuse.

a whole epoch, already nearly effaced from our memory—this is not to think. Chicot dwelt, for the night, in a world already left by him far behind, and peopled with illustrious or gracious spirits, which the look of the pale woman, like a faithful lamp, discovered to him, defiling one by one before him, with its suit of happy and terrible remembrances.

Chicot, who so much regretted his sleep on returning from the Louvre, did not even think of retiring to bed; so that when daybreak gently silvered the windows of his room :—

‘The hour of spirits is passed,’ said he, ‘we must now think a little of the living.’

He rose, buckled on his large sword, threw over his shoulders a woollen surtout of a dark plum colour, and of a texture impervious to the heaviest rain, and, with the stoic firmness of a sage, he examined, by a glance, the depth of his purse and the soles of his shoes.

The latter appeared to Chicot fit to commence a campaign; the other merited some little attention.

We shall therefore make a halt in our narrative, to take time to describe it to our readers.

Chicot, a man of an ingenious imagination, as all know, had hollowed the main beam which crossed his house from end to end, thus contributing at once to ornament, for it was painted of different colours, and to solidity, for it was at least eighteen inches thick.

In this beam, by means of a concavity a foot and a half long, and six inches in width, he had made a strong coffer, whose inside contained one thousand crowns in gold.

But here is the calculation made by Chicot.

‘I expend daily,’ he said, ‘the twentieth part of one of these crowns; I have, therefore, enough to support me for 20,000 days. I shall not live so long, but I may, possibly, live the half of them; and besides, as I grow old, my wants, and consequently my expenses, will increase; for our comfort still progresses in proportion to the diminution of our days. All this will allow me twenty-five or thirty good years to live. Come, thank God, ’tis quite enough.’

Chicot therefore, by the calculation we have made after him, found himself quite wealthy, and this tranquillity as to the future produced in him a sort of pride,

Not that Chicot was avaricious, for a long time even he had been prodigal, but poverty occasioned him horror, for he knew that it fell like a mantle of lead on the shoulders, and that it bends the stoutest heart.

This morning, then, on opening his chest to complete his accounts by himself, he said :—

‘*Ventre de biche !* the present race is a hard one, and the times are not liberal. I have no delicacy to observe with Henry. These thousand crowns of gold do not even come from him, but from an uncle who had promised me six times as much. It is true that this uncle was a bachelor. If it were still dark, I would go and take a hundred crowns from the pocket of the King; but it is daylight, and I have no resources but in myself and in Gorenflot.’

This idea of drawing the cash from Gorenflot, made his worthy friend smile.

‘It would look well,’ he continued, ‘for Maître Gorenflot, who owes his fortune to me, to refuse his friend a hundred crowns for the service of the King, who has named him prior of the Jacobins.’

‘Ah !’ he continued, shaking his head, ‘he is no longer Gorenflot.’

‘Yes, but Robert Briquet is still Chicot.’

‘But this letter of the King, this famous epistle intended to set the court of Navarre in a blaze, I ought to have gone for it before the day broke, and here is the day arrived. Bah ! these means I will have, and will strike a terrible blow on the skull of Gorenflot, if I find his brains too thick to persuade.’

‘Forward, then.’

Chicot adjusted the plank which concealed his hiding place, secured it with four nails, covered it with the flag stone, upon which he sprinkled some dust to fill up the joints; and then, ready to start, he regarded for a last time the little room in which, for so many days, he had been safe and guarded, like the heart in the breast.

He then glanced at the house opposite.

‘Some fine night,’ he said to himself, ‘these devils of Joyeuses may very likely set fire to my hotel, to attract, for a moment, to her window, the invisible lady. Eh ! eh ! but if they burn my house, they will at the same time make an ingot of my thousand crowns. In truth, I think I should act prudently in hiding it in the ground. Come

then, well, if Messieurs de Joyeuse burn my house, the King shall repay them to me.'

Thus assured, Chicot closed the door, and carried away the key; and as he left to gain the bank of the river:—

'Eh! eh!' he said to himself, 'this Nicholas Poulain is very likely to come here, thinking my absence suspicious, and—ah ça! why this morning my ideas are running wild. Onward.'

As Chicot closed the street door with no less care than he had closed the door of his chamber, he perceived at his window, the attendant of the unknown female, who was snuffing the air, hoping, no doubt, at so early an hour, to be unobserved.

This man, as we have already said, was completely disfigured by a wound received on the left temple, and which extended down a portion of the cheek. One of his eyebrows, also, displaced by the violence of the blow, almost entirely concealed the left eye, sunk deeply into its orbit.

It was a strange thing, but with this bald head and gray beard, his eye was quick, and the cheek that was spared had almost the freshness of youth.

At the sight of Robert Briquet descending his door steps, he covered his head with his capuchin or hood. He made a movement to re-enter; but Chicot made a sign for him to remain.

'Neighbour,' said Chicot, 'the hubbub of last night has disgusted me with my house; I am going for a few weeks to my farm-house; will you be so obliging as to give a look this way now and then.'

'Yes, sir,' replied the unknown, 'very willingly.'

'And if you see any thieves——'

'I have a good arquebus, sir, be perfectly assured.'

'Thank you. But I have another favour to ask of you, neighbour.'

'Speak, I am listening.'

Chicot appeared to be measuring, with his eye, the distance from the speaker.

'Tis a delicate affair to speak to you at such a distance, neighbour,' he said.

'I will come down then,' replied the stranger.

In fact, Chicot saw him disappear, and as, during this disappearance, he had approached the house, he heard

steps drawing near, then the door opened, and they found themselves face to face.

This time, the attendant had completely enveloped his face in his hood.

'It is very cold this morning,' he said, to hide or excuse this mysterious precaution.

'A cold breeze, neighbour,' replied Chicot, affecting not to regard the speaker, in order to put him more at his ease.

'I am listening, sir.'

'I am going——' said Chicot.

'You have already done me the honour of telling me so.'

'I remember it perfectly; but on quitting, I leave money at my house.'

'So much the worse, sir; so much the worse, sir; take it with you.'

'No, the man is heavier, and less resolute, when he seeks to save his purse at the same time as his life. I therefore leave the money here, well concealed, however; so well hid, in fact, that I have no reason to expect any misfortune but fire. If that should happen to me, will you be kind enough, as my neighbour, to watch the combustion of a certain large beam which you see there, on the right, the end cut into the shape of a water-spout; watch, I say, and search amongst the cinders.'

'Really, sir,' said the unknown, with evident discontent, 'you greatly inconvenience me. This confidence will be much better made to a friend than to a man whom you do not know; whom you cannot know.'

Whilst saying this, his brilliant eye interrogated the affected grimace of Chicot.

'Tis true,' replied the latter, 'I do not know you; but I am very confident in physiognomies, and I think yours is that of an honest man.'

'But see, sir, the responsibility you place in me. May it not happen that all this music annoys my mistress as it has yourself, and that we might remove?'

'Well!' replied Chicot, 'in that case there is an end of it, and I shall not look to you for it, neighbour.'

'Thank you for the confidence you place in a poor stranger,' said the attendant bowing; 'I will endeavour to show myself worthy of it.'

And saluting Chicot he retired within his house.

Chicot, on his part, bowed to him affectedly.

And seeing the door closed upon him,—

‘Poor young man,’ he murmured, ‘this time it is a real phantom, and yet I have seen him so gay, so lively, so handsome!’

CHAPTER XIX

THE PRIORY OF THE JACOBINS

THE priory which the King had given to Gorenflot, to recompense him for his loyal services, and especially his brilliant conduct, was situate about two hundred yards on the other side of the gate Saint Antoine.

At this period it was a quarter well frequented, the King making repeated visits to the château of Vincennes.

Here and there, on the route of the Donjon, some small houses of the grand seigneurs, with pretty gardens and magnificent courts, formed a sort of appendage to the château, and many a rendezvous was made, from which, despite the mania which the smallest bourgeois possessed of busying himself about state affairs, we dare say that politics were most carefully excluded.

It resulted from these ins and outs of the court, that the route rose to the importance which the Champs Elysées now enjoy.

It was, we may conceive, a fine position for the priory, which rose proudly on the right of the road of Vincennes.

This priory was composed of a square building, enclosing an enormous court, planted with trees; of a vegetable garden, situate behind the house; and of several inferior buildings, which gave to the priory the length of a village.

Two hundred religious Jacobins occupied the dormitories situate at the end of the court, parallel with the road.

In front, four handsome windows, with a single iron balcony running the whole length of the four windows, gave to the apartments of the priory, air, light, and life.

Like a city, which may be presumed to be some day besieged, the prior found all his resources in the tributary territories of Montreuil, of Charoune, and of Saint Mandé. His pasturage fattened a troop, always complete, of

fifty bullocks and ninety-nine sheep : the religious orders; either from tradition, or writings, could never possess a hundred.

A private palace also sheltered ninety-nine pigs, of a peculiar breed, which were under the immediate superintendence of a pork-shop keeper, chosen by Dom Modeste himself.

For this honourable choice the butcher was indebted to the exquisite sausages, stuffed ears, and black puddings, which he once furnished to the hostelry of the Corne d'Abondance. Dom Modeste, acknowledging the pleasant repasts he had formerly made at the house of Maître Bonhomme, thus discharged the debts of brother Gorenflot.

It is unnecessary to speak of the offices and the cellar. The espalier of fruit-trees exposed to the morning sun, produced peaches, apricots, and figs, incomparable; and in addition, preserves of fruits and sugared pasties were perfected by a certain brother Eusèbe, author of the famous sweetmeat, which the Hôtel de Ville, of Paris, offered to the two queens at the time when the last banquet of ceremony took place.

As to the cellar, Gorenflot had furnished it himself, by emptying those of Burgundy, for he had that innate predilection of all real wine-bibbers, who pretend that the wine of Burgundy is the only true wine.

'Tis in the bosom of this priory, a veritable paradise of idlers and gourmands, in the sumptuous apartment of the first floor, the balcony of which overlooked the high road, that we shall find Gorenflot, ornamented with an extra or double chin, and with that sort of venerable gravity which the constant habit of repose and comforts gives to the commonest physiognomies.

In his robe, white as milk, and his black cape, which warms his large shoulders, Gorenflot has no longer the liberty of movement, enjoyed under his gray robe of a simple monk, but he has more of majesty.

His hand, as thick as a leg of mutton, rests upon a quarto, which it completely covers; his two large feet almost crush his foot-stool under them; and his arms have not length enough to make the circuit of his body.

Half-past seven morning has just struck. The prior has risen last, profiting by the indulgence which gives to the head one hour's sleep more than to the other friars;

but he still tranquilly continues his night in a great fauteuil, with wings, and soft as eider-down.

The furniture of the room in which the worthy abbé is asleep, is more mundane than religious; a table, with turned feet, and covered with a rich cloth; pictures of religious gallantry—a singular combination of love and devotion, which is nowhere discovered in art but at this period; precious vases for the church or table on the shelves; at the windows massive curtains of Venetian brocade, more splendid in their antiquity than the most expensive modern stuffs. This is the detail of riches, of which Dom Modeste Gorenflot was become the possessor; and this by the grace of God, of the King, and more especially of Chicot.

The prior slept in his fauteuil then, whilst the day came to pay him its accustomed visit, and caressed, with its silver rays, the purple and pearly hues of the visage of the sleeper.

The door of the chamber gently opened, and two monks entered, without awaking the prior.

The first was a man of thirty or thirty-five years of age, thin, pale, and nervously bent in his robe of a Jacobin; he carried his head high; his look, as piercing as the glance from a falcon's eye, commanded even before he spoke; and yet his regard was softened by the play of two long white eyelids, which, on closing, discovered the large discoloured circle with which his eyes were surrounded.

But when, on the contrary, this sloe black eye sparkled between the thick eyebrows and the yellow ground of the orbit, it was as the lightning which flashes from the folds of two clouds of copper.

This monk was named brother Borromée; he had been for the last three weeks treasurer of the convent.

The other was a young man of seventeen or eighteen, with black and piercing eyes, a bold mien, swelling chin, short, but well made; and who, having turned back his long sleeves, exhibited, with a sort of pride, two nervous arms, prompt to manœuvre.

'The prior still sleeps,' said the youngest of the two friars to the other, 'shall we awaken him?'

'On no account, brother Jacques,' replied the treasurer.

'Really, it is a pity to have a prior who sleeps so long,' said the young brother, 'for we might have tried the arms

this morning. Have you remarked what superb cuirasses and arquebusses there are among the number ?'

'Silence, brother, you will be heard.'

'What a misfortune !' continued the young friar, stamping with his foot, the sound of which was checked by the thick carpet, 'what a misfortune ! 'tis so fine to-day, the court is so dry, what a fine exercise we should have, brother treasurer !'

'We must wait, my child,' said brother Borromée, with a feigned submission, contradicted by the fire of his glance.

'Why do you not order them to distribute the arms ?' impetuously replied Jacques, tucking up the sleeves which had fallen down.

'Me, order ?'

'Yes, you.'

'I do not command, you well know it, brother,' replied Borromée, with compunction, 'is he not the master here ?'

'In that fauteuil—asleep—when all the world's awake !' said Jacques, in a tone less respectful than impatient—'the master ?'

And a look of sublime intelligence seemed to penetrate to the very soul of brother Borromée.

'Let us respect his rank and his sleep,' said the latter, advancing to the middle of the room, and that so awkwardly, that he overthrew a stool on the carpet.

Although the carpet had softened the noise of the upset, as it had that of the heel-tap of brother Jacques, Dom Modeste, at the noise, made a start, and awoke.

'Who is there ?' he exclaimed, in the trembling voice of a sleeping sentinel.

'Lord prior,' said brother Borromée, 'pardon, if we trouble your pious meditation; but I am come to take your orders.'

'Ah ! good-morning, brother Borromée,' said Gorenflot, with a slight nod of the head.

And after a moment's reflection, during which it was evident that he was stretching every chord of his memory,—

'What orders ?' he inquired, blinking three or four times.

'Relative to the arms and armour.'

'To the arms and armour ?' demanded Gorenflot.

'Without doubt; your lordship ordered arms and armour to be brought.'

'To whom was the order given?'

'To me.'

'To you? I commanded arms?'

'Not the least doubt, lord prior,' said Borromée, in a firm and steady voice.

'I!' repeated Dom Modeste, filled with astonishment; 'I! and when?'

'A week ago.'

'Ah! if it was a week since——. But for what purpose these arms?'

'You said to me, seigneur—and I repeat your own words—you said to me, "Brother Borromée, it will be right to procure arms, to arm our friars and brothers; gymnastic exercises develop the strength of the body, as pious exhortations develop those of the spirit."'

'I said that!' said Gorenflot.

'Yes, revered prior, and I, unworthy and obedient brother, hastened to accomplish your orders, and have procured arms of war.'

'It is strange,' murmured Gorenflot: 'I remember nothing of all this.'

'You even added, reverend prior, this Latin text: *Militat spiritu, militat gladio.*'

'Oh!' exclaimed Dom Modeste, opening wide his eyes, 'I added the text?'

'I have a faithful memory, reverend prior,' replied Borromée, modestly lowering his eyelids.

'If I said so,' replied Gorenflot, mildly nodding his head, 'I had my reason for doing so, brother Borromée. Indeed it has always been my opinion that the body should be exercised; and when I was a simple friar, I fought with words, and also with the sword. *Militat—spiritus.* Very well, brother Borromée, 'twas an inspiration from the Almighty.'

'I will, therefore, go and finish executing your orders, reverend prior,' said Borromée, retiring with brother Jacques, who, trembling with joy, drew him by the end of his robe.

'Go,' said Gorenflot majestically.

'Ah! lord prior,' said Borromée, entering a few seconds after his disappearance, 'I forgot.'

'What?'

'In the parlour there is a friend of your lordship, who requests to speak with you.'

'What is his name?'

'Maître Robert Briquet.'

'Maître Robert Briquet,' repeated Gorenflot, 'he is no friend, brother Borromée; he is merely an acquaintance.'

'Then your reverence will not receive him?'

'Yes, yes,' said Gorenflot, coolly: 'the man amuses me. Show him up.'

Brother Borromée bowed a second time and left. As to brother Jacques, he had made but one bound from the apartment of the prior to the room in which the arms were deposited.

Five minutes after, the door opened, and Chicot appeared.

CHAPTER XX

THE TWO FRIENDS

DOM MODESTE did not quit the comfortably reclining position he had taken. Chicot crossed the chamber to reach him.

But the prior mildly bent his head, to indicate to the new-comer that he was seen. Chicot appeared not for a moment astonished at the indifference of the prior; he continued to advance, and when arrived at a respectful distance, he bowed to him.

'Good-morning, Monsieur the Prior,' he said.

'Ah! you here,' said Gorenflot; 'you are come to life again as it appears?'

'Did you think me dead then, Monsieur the Prior?'

'Damn! you were no longer seen.'

'I had business.'

'Ah!'

Chicot knew that unless warmed by two or three bottles of old Burgundy, Gorenflot was sparing of his words. But as in all probability, seeing the early hour of the morning, Gorenflot was still fasting, he took a comfortable fauteuil, and installed himself silently in the chimney corner, stretching his feet on the hand dogs, and resting his loins on the back of the easy-chair.

'Are you come to breakfast with me, Monsieur Briquet?' inquired Dom Modeste.

'Perhaps, lord prior.'

'You must not be angry with me, Monsieur Briquet, if I find it impossible to give you all the time I should wish.'

'And who the devil demands your time, Monsieur the Prior? ventre de biche! I did not even ask to breakfast with you, it was you who offered it.'

'Assuredly, Monsieur Briquet,' said Dom Modeste, with an uneasiness which the firm tone of Chicot justified; 'yes, undoubtedly I offered it you, but——'

'But you thought I should not accept it?'

'Oh! no. Is it my habit to be artful, say, Monsieur Briquet?'

'We assume all the habits we wish, when we are of your superiority, Monsieur the Prior,' replied Chicot, with one of those smiles which belonged to him alone.

Dom Modeste regarded Chicot with blinking eyes. It was impossible to guess whether Chicot jested or spoke seriously. Chicot rose.

'Why do you rise, Monsieur Briquet?' demanded Gorenflot.

'Because I am going.'

'And why are you going, since you said you would breakfast with me?'

'In the first place, I did not say I would breakfast with you.'

'Pardon, I offered it to you.'

'And I replied, "Perhaps"; perhaps does not mean "Yes."'

'You are angry?'

Chicot laughed.

'I, get angry,' he said; 'and why should I be angry? Because you are impudent, ignorant, and vulgar? Oh! my dear lord prior, I have known you too long to feel angry at your little imperfections.'

Gorenflot, thunderstruck at this plain outbreak of his guest, remained with his mouth open and arms stretched out.

'Adieu, Monsieur the Prior,' said Chicot.

'Oh! do not go.'

'My journey cannot be delayed.'

'You travel?'

'I have a mission.'

'And from whom?'

'From the King.'

Gorenflot fell deeper and deeper in wonder and astonishment.

'A mission,' he said, 'a mission from the King; you have again seen him, then?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'And how did he receive you?'

'With enthusiasm; he has a memory, although he is a king.'

'A mission from the King,' muttered Gorenflot, 'and I impudent, ignorant, and vulgar.'

His heart collapsed by degrees, like a balloon that has lost its wind by the piercing of a needle.

'Adieu,' repeated Chicot.

Gorenflot rose from his fauteuil, and with his large hand arrested the fugitive, who, we confess, allowed himself to be easily held.

'Come, let us explain,' said the prior.

'On what?' demanded Chicot.

'On your susceptibility to-day.'

'I, I am the same to-day as always.'

'No.'

'A plain mirror of the men among whom I live.'

'No.'

'You laugh, I laugh; you sulk, I make grimaces.'

'No, no, no!'

'Yes, yes, yes!'

'Well! come, I confess it, I was preoccupied.'

'Really?'

'Will you not be indulgent to a man who is a prey to the most painful labour? Is my head my own, mon Dieu! Is not this priory like the government of a province? Imagine then that I command two hundred men, that I am at one time steward, architect, intendant; and all this without reckoning my spiritual duties.'

'Oh! 'tis too much indeed for an unworthy servant of God.'

'Oh! that is ironical,' said Gorenflot; 'Monsieur Briquet, have you lost your Christian charity?'

'I had some then?'

'I also think that you are somewhat envious; take care, envy is an open sin.'

'Envy in my actions ? And what can I envy ? I ask you.'

'Hum ! you say to yourself, "The prior Dom Modeste Gorenflot advances progressively, he is in the way of preferment."'

'Whilst I am on the descending track, eh ?' replied Chicot ironically.

'Tis the misfortune of your false position, Monsieur Briquet.

'Monsieur the Prior, do you remember the text of the gospel ?'

'What text ?'

'He who exalteth himself shall be humbled, but he who humbleth himself shall be exalted.'

'Peuh !' exclaimed Gorenflot.

'Come, here is one who doubts the holy scriptures, the heretic,' exclaimed Chicot, joining his two hands.

'Heretic !' repeated Gorenflot, 'tis the Huguenots who are heretics.'

'Sceptic then.'

'Come, what do you mean, Monsieur Briquet ? Really you dazzle me.'

'Nothing, except that I am going on a journey, and that I am come to take my farewell of you. Adieu, therefore, Seigneur Dom Modeste.'

'You do not leave me in this manner !'

'Yes, pardieu !'

'A friend ?'

'In prosperity we have no longer friends.'

'You, Chicot ?'

'I am no longer Chicot; you reproached me with it but now.'

'I, when so ?'

'When you spoke of my false position.'

'Reproached ! ah ! what words you have to-day.'

And the prior bent his large head, and his three chins, smoothed into one, rested on his bull's neck.

Chicot observed him from the corner of his eye; he saw him turn slightly pale.

'Adieu, and without malice for the truths I have told you.'

And he made a movement as if going.

'Tell me what you like, Monsieur Chicot,' said Dom Modeste; 'but have no more of such looks for me.'

'Ah! ah! it is rather late.'

'Never too late! eh! stay, we do not part without eating; the devil! 'tis not healthy, you have told me so twenty times! Well! let us breakfast.'

Chicot had decided upon reconquering all his advantages at one blow.

'My faith, no!' said he, 'the living is not good here.'

Gorenflot had supported the former attacks with courage; under this he gave way.

'The living is bad here?' he stammered out, confounded.

'Tis my opinion at least,' said Chicot.

'Had you any complaint to make of your last dinner?'

'I have still the atrocious flavour in my palate—faugh!'

'You said faugh,' said Gorenflot, raising his hands to heaven.

'Yes,' said Chicot resolutely, 'I said faugh.'

'But why? speak.'

'The pork cutlets were disgracefully burnt.'

'Oh!'

'The stuffed ears did not crack between the teeth.'

'Oh!'

'The capon tasted like water.'

'Just Heaven.'

'The fat was not taken off the soup.'

'Misericorde.'

'In the gravy there was an oil that is still swimming in my stomach.'

'Chicot, Chicot,' sighed Dom Modeste, in the same tone that Caesar, expiring, said to his assassin, 'Brutus, Brutus.'

'Besides you have no time to give me.'

'I?'

'You told me you were busy; did you not tell me so, yes or no? It only remains for you to turn liar.'

'Well! this business can be deferred. 'Tis only a female to receive, nothing more.'

'Receive her then.'

'No! no! dear Monsieur Chicot! although she has sent me a hundred bottles of Sicily wine.'

'A hundred bottles of Sicily wine!'

'I shall not receive her, though she is probably some grand lady; I shall not receive her; I will only receive you, dear Monsieur Chicot. This grand lady wishes to become my penitent, and sends bottles of Sicily wine by

the hundred. Well ! if you exact it I will refuse her my spiritual advice. I will request her to obtain another director.'

'And you will do all this ?'

'To breakfast with you, dear Monsieur Chicot, to repair my wrongs towards you.'

'Your wrongs proceed from your outrageous pride, Dom Modeste.'

'I will humble myself, my friend.'

'From your insolent idleness.'

'Chicot, Chicot, from to-day, I will mortify myself, by making my friars do their exercise daily.'

'Your friars their exercise,' said Chicot, opening his eyes; 'and what exercise, that of the knife and fork ?'

'No; that of arms.'

'The exercise of arms ?'

'Yes; and yet 'tis fatiguing to command.'

'You command the Jacobins in their exercise ?'

'I am going to command them, at any rate.'

'From to-morrow ?'

'From to-day, if you require it.'

'And who, then, broached the idea of making friars do their exercise ?'

'Myself, it seems,' said Gorenflot.

'You ! impossible.'

'Yes, I gave the order to brother Borromée.'

'What is brother Borromée ?'

'Ah ! true, you do not know him.'

'What is he ?'

'He is the treasurer.'

'How is it you have a treasurer unknown to me, you scrub ?'

'He came since your last visit.'

'And from whence comes your treasurer ?'

'M. the Cardinal de Guise recommended him to me.'

'In person ?'

'By letter, dear Monsieur Chicot, by letter.'

'Was it that figure of a hawk I saw below ?'

'The same.'

'Who announced me ?'

'Yes.'

'Oh, oh !' said Chicot involuntarily; 'and what virtues has this treasurer, so warmly supported by M. the Cardinal de Guise ?'

'He reckons like Pythagoras.'

'And 'tis with him you have decided upon these exercises of arms?'

'Yes, my friend.'

'That is, it was he who proposed to you to arm your friars, was it not?'

'No, dear Monsieur Chicot,' the idea was my own, entirely my own?'

'And with what object?'

'With the intention of arming them.'

'No pride, hardened sinner; pride is a grievous sin; the idea did not come from you?'

'From him or me; I do not exactly know whether it was from him or me that the idea came; no, no, decidedly it was from me. It even appears that upon this occasion I pronounced a very judicious and brilliant Latin word.'

Chicot drew near the prior.

'A Latin word! you, my dear prior,' said Chicot; 'and can you remember this Latin word?'

'Militat spiritu.'

'Militat spiritu; militat gladio.'

'That's it, that's it,' cried Dom Modeste, with enthusiasm.

'Come, come,' said Chicot, 'it is impossible to excuse oneself with better grace than you have done; I pardon you.'

'Oh!' said Gorenflot meltingly.

'You are still my friend, my real friend.'

Gorenflot attempted a tear.

'But let us breakfast, and I shall be indulgent for the breakfast.'

'Listen,' said Gorenflot with warmth; 'I will send word to our brother the cook, that if the cheer is not royal, I will have him confined.'

'Do so, do so,' said Chicot; 'you are the master, my dear prior.'

'And we will uncork some of the bottles of the fair penitent.'

'I will assist you with my hints, my friend.'

'Let me embrace you, Chicot!'

'Don't stifle me, and let us talk.'

CHAPTER XXI

THE CONVIVES

GORENFLOT was not long in giving his orders. If the worthy prior was really on the ascendant line, as he pretended, it was especially in that which concerned the details of a repast, and the progress of the culinary science.

Dom Modeste sent for brother Eusebius, who appeared, not before his chief, but before his judge. From the manner in which he had been commanded, he surmised that something extraordinary in his way of business, was about to take place.

'Brother Eusebius,' said Gorenflot, in a severe tone; 'listen to what M. Robert Briquet will say to you, my friend; you neglect things, as it appears. I have heard of serious charges against your last biscuits, and a fatal negligence respecting the crispness of your ears. Take care, brother Eusebius, take care; a single step, made in the wrong path, drags in the whole body.'

The monk turned red and white by turns, and stammered out an excuse, which was not admitted.

'Enough!' said Gorenflot.

Brother Eusebius was silent.

'What have you to-day for dinner?' demanded the reverend prior.

'I shall have some eggs, fried with coxcombs.'

'What next?'

'Stuffed mushrooms.'

'What next?'

'Craw-fish, au vin de Madère.'

'Small fry, all this; small fry, something to lay a foundation; come—quick.'

'I shall have, besides, a ham aux pistaches.'

'Heuh!' said Chicot.

'Pardon,' timidly interrupted brother Eusebius; 'it is cooked with the wine of Xerxes dry; I place it, with some tender beef, in a pickle of huile from Aix, so that, with the fat of the beef, they eat the lean of the ham—and with the fat of the ham, the lean of the beef.'

Gorenflot hazarded towards Chicot a look, accompanied by a gesture of approbation.

'Good, that; is it not, Monsieur Robert?' he said. Chicot made a sign of half satisfaction.

'And what next have you?'

'We can dish you up an eel in a minute.'

'No eels,' said Chicot.

'I think, Monsieur Briquet,' replied brother Eusebius, emboldened by degrees, 'I think you might taste my eels, without repenting of it.'

'Are they rare ones, then, your eels?'

'I feed them in a particular manner.'

'Oh! oh!'

'Yes,' added Gorenflot; 'it appears that the Romans or the Greeks, I am not sure which—a people of Italy, however—fed the lampreys like brother Eusebius. He read this in an ancient author, named Suetonius, who wrote upon cookery.'

'What, brother Eusebius,' exclaimed Chicot; 'you give your eels men to eat?'

'No, monsieur; I cut up small the intestines and livers of game and other birds; I add a little pork; I make of all this a sort of sausage meat, which I throw to my eels, which, in fresh and sweet water, on a fine gravel, become fat in a month, and, whilst fattening, grow considerably longer. The one I shall offer to the lord prior to-day, for example, weighs nine pounds.'

'Tis a serpent, then,' said Chicot.

'She swallowed, at a gulp, a chicken six days old.'

'And how did you cook it?' demanded Chicot.

'Yes; how did you cook it?' repeated the prior.

'Skinned, fried, rubbed with anchovy, rolled in some fine bread crumbs, then replaced on the gridiron for ten seconds; after which, I shall have the honour of serving you with it, swimming in a spiced sauce of pepper and garlic.'

'But the sauce?'

'Yes; the sauce itself.'

'Plain sauce of huile d'Aix, beat up with citrons and mustard.'

'Perfect,' said Chicot.

Brother Eusebius breathed once more.

'Next, there is the pastry,' judiciously observed Gorenflot.

'I shall invent some dishes capable of pleasing the seigneur prior.'

'Very well; I shall leave it to you,' said Gorenflot; 'show yourself worthy of my confidence.'

Eusebius bowed.

'I may retire, then?' he said.

The prior consulted Chicot.

'Let him retire,' said Chicot.

'Retire, and send our brother, the butler, to me.'

Eusebius bowed, and retired.

The butler succeeded brother Eusebius, and received his orders not less precise and no less detailed.

Ten minutes afterwards, before the table, covered with a fine cloth, the two convives, buried in two large fauteuils with cushions, were seated opposite each other, knife and fork in hand, like two duellists.

The table, large enough for six persons, was filled, however, so well had the butler accumulated the bottles in different forms and etiquette.

Eusebius, faithful to the programme, sent the boiled eggs, the crawfish, and mushrooms, which perfumed the air with a soft odour of truffles, fresh butter, like the cream of thyme, and Madeira wine.

Chicot set to, like a hungry man. The prior, on the contrary, like a man who mistrusts himself, his cook, and his guest.

But after a few minutes, it was Gorenflot who devoured, whilst Chicot observed.

They commenced with the Rhenish wine; they then passed to the Burgundy of 1550; they made an excursion to an hermitage of which they had forgotten the date; they tasted the Saint-Percy; and at length they passed to the wine of the fair penitent.

'What do you think of it?' demanded Gorenflot, after tasting three times without daring to pronounce.

'Velvety, but light,' said Chicot; 'and what is the name of your penitent?'

'I do not know.'

'Ouais! you do not know her name?'

'No, my faith, we treat like ambassadors.'

Chicot made a pause, during which he gently closed his eyes to relish a sip of wine, which he retained in his mouth before swallowing, but in reality to reflect.

'And so,' he said, in about five minutes, 'tis in the face of a general army I have the honour of dining?'

'Oh! mon Dieu, yes!'

'What ! you sigh in saying this ?'

'Ah ! 'tis very fatiguing, truly.'

'No doubt, but 'tis honourable, 'tis grand !'

'Superb ! only that there is no longer silence in the offices ; and the day before yesterday, I was obliged to suppress a dish at supper.'

'Suppress a dish ! and why so ?'

Because several of my soldiers, I must confess it, had the audacity to find insufficient the dish of *raisiné de Bourgoyne* which they have every third Friday.'

'Only see that ! insufficient ! and what reason did they give for this insufficiency ?'

'They pretended they were still hungry, and demanded some light food, such as veal, lobster, or good fish. Can you understand these cormorants ?'

'Why, if they take great exercise, 'tis not astonishing that these monks are hungry.'

'Where will the merit be ?' said Don Modeste ; 'live well and work well, 'tis what every one can do. The devil ! we must learn to offer privations to the Almighty,' continued the worthy abbé, piling a quarter of the ham and beef on his fork already respectably provided with gelatine, of which brother Eusebius had not spoken.

'Drink, Modeste, drink,' said Chicot ; 'you will choke yourself, my dear friend, you are turning crimson.'

'Tis with indignation,' replied the prior, emptying his glass, which held half a pint.

Chicot allowed him to do it, and when Gorenflot had replaced his glass on the table,—

'Come,' said Chicot, 'finish your history, it interests me greatly, on my word of honour. You deprived them of a dish because they found they had not enough to eat ?'

'Just so.'

'Very ingenious.'

'So that the punishment had a rude effect ; I thought they would have revolted ; their eyes sparkled, their teeth chattered.'

'They were hungry,' said Chicot ; '*ventre de biche !* 'tis very natural !'

'They were hungry, eh ?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'You say so, you think so ?'

'I am sure of it.'

'Well, I remarked on that evening a strange fact, and which I have recommended to the analysis of science. I had brother Borromée called, charging him with my instructions touching this deprivation of a dish, to which I added, seeing the rebellion, deprivation of wine.'

'What then ?' said Chicot.

'At length, to crown the work, I commanded a fresh exercise, resolved to crush the hydra of revolt; the psalms say this, you know, listen; *Cabis poriabis diagonem*; eh! you know that, mordieu!'

'*Proculabis draconem*,' said Chicot, helping the prior to wine.

'*Draconem*, that's it, bravo! A propos of a dragon, eat some of that eel, then; it makes the mouth water, 'tis marvellous!'

'Thank you, but I cannot breathe; but narrate, narrate.'

'What?'

'Your strange fact.'

'Which? I do not remember.'

'The one you recommended to the savans.'

'Ah, yes! I have it, very well.'

'I am listening.'

'I prescribe an exercise for the evening; I expected to see my rascals thin, pale, and feverish; and I had prepared a very good sermon on this text—'He who eats my bread.''

'Dry bread,' said Chicot.

'Precisely, dry bread,' exclaimed Gorenflot, extending, by a Cyclopean laugh, his heavy jaws; 'I should have played upon the word, and I had previously laughed at it for a whole hour; when I found myself in the middle of a court, in presence of a troop of galliards, animated, nervous, hopping about like grasshoppers; and this is the illusion upon which I should wish to consult the savans.'

'Let us see the illusion.'

'Smelling the wine a league off——'

'The wine! Brother Borromée betrayed you, then?'

'Oh! I am sure of Borromée,' exclaimed Gorenflot; 'he is passive obedience personified; if I were to tell brother Borromée to roast himself slowly, he would instantly prepare the gridiron, and heat the faggots.'

'Thus it is to be a bad physiognomist,' said Chicot,

scratching his nose; 'to me he has not in the least this effect.'

'It's possible; but I know my Borromée you see, as I know you, my dear Chicot,' said Dom Modeste, who was getting sentimental, while getting drunk.

'And you say they smelt of wine?'

'Borromée?'

'No, your monks.'

'Like wine casks, to say nothing of their being as red as lobsters; I made the observation to Borromée.'

'Bravo!'

'Ah! I am not one who sleeps!'

'And what did he reply?'

'Listen, it was very subtle.'

'I believe it.'

'He replied, that a very sharp appetite produces effects similar to those of being satisfied.'

'Oh, oh!' said Chicot; 'tis indeed very subtle, as you observe. *Ventre de biche!* your Borromée is a strong man; I am no longer astonished that he has thin lips and nose. And this convinced you?'

'Completely, and you shall be convinced of it yourself; but come, approach a little nearer to me, for I no longer move without giddiness.'

Chicot approached, Gorenflot made of his large hand a speaking-trumpet, which he placed on the shoulder of Chicot.

'Well?' said Chicot.

'Wait, then, I resume. Do you remember the time when we were young, Chicot?'

'I remember it.'

'The time when the blood boiled, when immodest desires——?'

'Prior, prior!' said the chaste Chicot.

'Tis Borromée who is speaking, and I maintain that he is right; does not appetite produce at times the illusions of reality?'

Chicot commenced laughing so heartily that the table with all the bottles, shook like the deck of a ship.

'Good, good,' he said, 'I will put myself to school with brother Borromée; and when he has well initiated me into his theories, I shall ask a favour of you, my reverend.'

'And it shall be granted you, Chicot, as well as all you ask of your friend. Now, speak, what is this favour?'

'You shall give me the stewardship of the priory for a week.'

'And what will you do in this week?'

'I will feed Borromée on his theories, I will serve him with a plate and an empty glass, saying to him, "Desire with all the force of your hunger and your thirst a turkey-hen and mushrooms, and a bottle of Chambertin; but take care not to get drunk with the Chambertin; take care you don't have an indigestion with the turkey, dear brother philosopher."'

'And so you do not believe in appetite, heathen?'

'Enough! enough! I believe what I believe; but a truce to theories.'

'Be it so,' said Gorenflot; 'let us have done with it, and speak a little of reality?'

And Gorenflot helped himself to a full glass.

'In the good time you spoke of just now, Chicot,' he said, 'of our suppers at the Horn of Abundance.'

'Bravo, I thought you had forgotten all that, reverend.'

'Profane! all that sleeps under the majesty of my position; but morbleu! I am still the same.'

And Gorenflot commenced humming his favourite song, despite the 'chuts!' of Chicot.

'Quand l'anon est déslaché
Quand le vin est debouché
L'anon dresse son oreille
Le vin sort de la bouteille;
Mais rien n'est si eventé
Que le moine en plein treille;
Mais rien n'est si desbâte
Que le moine en liberté.' ¹

'But hush, miserable,' said Chicot, 'if Borromée should enter, he would think you had neither ate nor drank for a week.'

'If brother Borromée were to enter he would join me in chorus.'

¹ 'When the colt is unloosed,
When the wine is uncorked,
The colt lifts his head,
The wine sparkles up.
But nothing's so flat,
As the monk in his frock;
And nothing's more frisky,
Than the monk when at liberty.

'I do not believe it.'

'And I tell you——'

'To hold your tongue, and reply to my questions.'

'Speak then.'

'You don't give me time, drunkard.'

'Oh! drunkard! I!'

'Well, it results from the exercise of arms, that your convent is turned into a veritable barrack.'

'Yes, my friend, that is the word, a real barrack; last Thursday, is it Thursday? yes, it's Thursday. Stay then, I scarcely know if it is Thursday.'

'Thursday or Friday, the date is of no consequence.'

'Right, the fact is everything, is it not? well! Thursday or Friday, in the corridor, I found two novices who were fighting with the sabre, with two seconds who were also preparing to have a bout together.'

'And what did you do?'

'I sent for a whip to flog the novices, who fled; but Borromée——'

'Ah! ah! Borromée—Borromée again.'

'Always.'

'But Borromée?'

'Borromée caught them again, and scourged them in such a fashion that they are still in bed, the misérables.'

'I demand to see their shoulders to appreciate the strength of arm of brother Borromée,' said Chicot.

'Disturb ourselves to look at other shoulders than shoulders of mutton, never! Eat some apricot tart, then.'

'No, morbleu; I shall choke.'

'Drink then.'

'No; I'll have a walk.'

'Well! and don't you think I have to walk? and yet I drink.'

'Oh! you? it's different; and besides, to read the commandments, you want lungs.'

'Well, a glass then, only one glass, of this digestive liqueur, of which Eusebius alone has the secret.'

'Agreed.'

'It is so efficacious, that if you had dined like a glutton, you would necessarily find an appetite two hours after dinner.'

'What a receipt for the poor! Do you know if I were a king, I would have the head of Eusebius lopped; his

liqueur is capable of starving a whole kingdom. Oh ! oh ! what is that ?'

'Tis the exercise commencing,' said Gorenflot.

In fact, a great noise was heard, of voices and weapons, coming from the court.

'Without the chief ?' said Chicot. 'Oh ! oh ! these soldiers are rather ill disciplined it seems to me.'

'Without me ! never,' said Gorenflot; 'besides, that could not be, you understand, since 'tis I who command; and the instructor is—myself; and stay, as a proof, I hear brother Borromée, who is coming for my orders.'

And, at the same moment, Borromée entered, launching at Chicot an oblique glance, as prompt as the traitorous arrow of Parthius.

'Oh ! oh !' thought Chicot, 'you did wrong to glance at me so; it has betrayed you.'

'Lord prior,' said Borromée, 'they only wait for you, to commence the inspection of arms and cuirasses.'

'Cuirasses ! oh ! oh !' said Chicot to himself, 'a moment—I am with you;' and he hastily rose.

'You shall assist at my manœuvres,' said Gorenflot, rising in his turn, like a block of marble on legs; 'your arm, my friend; you shall see a good lesson.'

'The fact is, that the lord prior is a profound tactician,' said Borromée, sounding the imperturbable physiognomy of Chicot.

'Dom Modeste is a superior man in everything,' replied Chicot, bowing.

And then saying to himself,—

'Oh ! oh !' he murmured, 'play deep, my eaglet, or there is a kite who will pluck your feathers.'

CHAPTER XXII

BROTHER BORROMÉE

WHEN Chicot, supporting the reverend prior, arrived by the grand staircase in the court of the priory, the scene was exactly that of an immense barrack in full activity.

Divided into two bands of one hundred men each; the monks, halberd, pike, or musket in hand, waited like soldiers for the appearance of their commander.

Nearly fifty, amongst the most zealous and vigorous had covered their heads with casques or head-pieces; a long sword was suspended from their waist by a belt; they wanted nothing but a buckler in their hands to resemble the ancient Medes, or cock eyes to look like the modern Chinese.

Others displayed proudly the arched cuirasses, on which they seemed delighted to strike with an iron gauntlet.

Others, lastly, enclosed in armlets and thigh pieces, exercised themselves in developing their joints, deprived of elasticity by these partial ligaments.

Brother Borromée took a casque from the hands of a novice, and placed it on his own head by a movement as prompt, as regular, as though he had been a German trooper or lansquenet.

Whilst he was fixing the loops, Chicot could not help regarding the helmet; and whilst so doing, his lips smiled; and whilst smiling, he walked round Borromée, as though admiring him at every point.

He did more, he approached the treasurer, and passed his hand over one of the inequalities of the helmet.

'You have a magnificent helmet there, brother Borromée,' he said; 'where did you buy it, my dear prior?'

Gorenflot could not reply, for at this moment they were attaching him to a splendid cuirass, which, although spacious enough to encompass the Farnesian Hercules, painfully confined the luxurious undulations of the worthy prior's flesh.

'Don't buckle so tight, mordieu,' exclaimed Gorenflot; 'don't squeeze me in so, I shall be stifled. I shall not be able to speak. Enough! enough!'

'You inquired of the reverend prior, I think,' said Borromée, 'where he purchased my helmet?'

'I asked that of the reverend prior, and not of you,' replied Chicot, 'because, I presume, that in this convent, as in all others, nothing is done but with the order of the superior.'

'Certainly,' said Gorenflot, 'nothing is done here without my order. What is your question, dear Monsieur Briquet?'

'I ask brother Borromée if he knows from whom he had this helmet?'

'It made part of a lot of armour which the reverend prior purchased yesterday to arm the convent.'

'I ?' said Gorenflot.

Your lordship may recollect, that you commanded there should be brought here several helmets and cuirasses, and your orders were executed.'

'Tis true, 'tis true,' said Gorenflot.

'Ventre de biche !' said Chicot, 'my helmet was much attached to its master then, that after carrying it myself to the Hotel de Guise, it again finds me, like a dog that is lost, in the priory of the Jacobins.'

At this moment, by a gesture from brother Borromée, the lines were regularly formed, and silence was established in the ranks.

Chicot seated himself on a bench, that he might view the manœuvres at his ease.

Gorenflot stood, resting on his legs like two posts.

'Attention !' said brother Borromée, in a gentle tone.

Dom Modeste drew a gigantic sword from its iron sheath, and brandishing it in the air, he cried with the voice of a stentor,—

'Attention !'

'Your reverence will be fatigued, perhaps, in giving the commands. Now,' said brother Borromée, with a happy forethought, 'your reverence suffered this morning; if it would please him to indulge his health, I would command the exercise to-day.'

'I should like it much,' said Dom Modeste; 'in fact I am suffering, choking—go.'

Borromée bowed, and like a man used to these sort of assents, he placed himself in front of the troop.

'What a complaisant servitor !' said Chicot; 'that galliard is a pearl.'

'He is charming : I told you so,' replied Dom Modeste.

'I am sure he does the same thing for you every day,' said Chicot.

'Oh—every day—he is as submissive as a slave; I have only to reproach him for his readiness to oblige. Humility is not slavery,' added Gorenflot sententiously.

'So that you have really nothing to do here, and may sleep on your two pillows; brother Borromée watches for you !'

'Oh ! mon Dieu ! yes.'

'That is what I wished to know,' said Chicot, whose questions were directed against Borromée alone.

It was a marvel to see, like a war-horse, the treasurer of the monks stand up conspicuous under his harness. His excited eyes launched flashes, his vigorous arm made such clever passes with the sword, that he seemed like a master of arms fencing with a handful of soldiers. Every time brother Borromée made a demonstration, Gorenflot repeated it, adding,—

'Borromée is right; but I have already told you that—remember my lesson of yesterday. Pass the weapon from one hand to the other—raise the pike—raise it, then; the point on a level with the eye; steady. By Saint George! half turn to the left is exactly the same as half turn to the right, except that 'tis just the contrary.'

'Ventre de biche!' said Chicot, 'you are a skilful demonstrator.'

'Yes, yes,' said Gorenflot, caressing his triple chin; 'I understand the manœuvres pretty well.'

'And in Borromée you have an excellent pupil.'

'He comprehends me,' said Gorenflot; 'he is one of the most intelligent.'

The monks went through the military course, a sort of manœuvre much in vogue at this period; and also the pike, sword, and musket exercises.

When they came to this last exercise,—

'You shall see my little Jacques,' said the prior to Chicot.

'Who is your little Jacques?'

'A genteel lad I have attached to my person, because he has a quiet exterior, but a vigorous arm; and, with all this, the liveliness of saltpetre.'

'Ah! really! And where is this charming infant?'

'Wait, wait; I will show him to you; there, stay, yonder, he who is holding a musket in his hand, and prepares to fire the first.'

'And he fires well?'

'Why, at a hundred paces, the rogue would not fail to hit a pistole.'

'He's a galliard, who ought to serve smartly at a mass; but wait.'

'You know my little Jacques?'

'I, not the least in the world.'

'But you thought you knew him at first ?'

'Yes, I fancied I had seen him in a certain church one day, or rather night, when I was shut into a confessional. But no, I was wrong, it is not him.'

On this occasion, we must admit the words of Chicot were not exactly in accordance with the truth. Chicot was too good a physiognomist to forget features he had once remarked.

Whilst he was the object, as he had no doubt, of the attention of the prior and his friend, little Jacques, as Gorenflot called him, was charging a heavy musket, as long as himself. The musket being charged, he placed himself proudly at a hundred paces from the mark: and there, throwing back his right leg, with a military precision, he fired; the ball lodged in the centre of the mark, accompanied with the applause of the friars.

'Tudieu ! well aimed,' said Chicot; 'and on my word he's a pretty lad.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Jacques, whose pale cheeks reddened with the flush of pleasure.

'You handle your arms well, my child,' said Chicot.

'Why, sir, I am studying,' said Jacques.

And with these words, leaving his musket idle, after the proof of skill he had given, he took a pike from the hand of his neighbour, and performed a moulinet, which Chicot found executed to perfection.

Chicot renewed his compliments.

'Tis especially with the sword he excels,' said Dom Modeste. 'Those who know him think him very strong; it is true the rogue has muscles of iron and wrists of steel, and scrapes the iron from morning till night.'

'Ah ! let us see that,' said Chicot.

'You would try his strength,' said Borromée.

'I should like to prove it,' said Chicot.

'Oh !' continued the treasurer, 'there is no one here, except myself perhaps, capable of opposing him; have you some strength ?'

'I am but a poor bourgeois,' said Chicot, shaking his head; 'formerly, I used my rapier like another, but at present my legs tremble, my arm shakes, and my head is no longer very quick.'

'But you practise sometimes, nevertheless ?' said Borromée.

'A little,' said Chicot, launching at Gorenflot a rapid

glance, which drew from the lips of the latter the name of Nicholas David.

But Borromée did not observe the smile; Borromée did not hear the name; and with a smile of tranquillity, he ordered them to bring the foils and fencing masks.

Jacques, all alive with joy, under his cold and sombre envelope, raised his robe as far as his knee, and fixed his sandal in the sand, making his challenge.

'Decidedly,' said Chicot, 'as being neither monk nor soldier, it is some time since I have used weapons. Will you be good enough, brother Borromée, you who are all muscle and tendon, to give a lesson to brother Jacques? will you consent to it, dear prior?' demanded Chicot of Dom Modeste.

'I order it!' exclaimed the prior, always delighted to give the word.

Borromée drew off his helmet; Chicot hastened to stretch out his hands, and the helmet, deposited in Chicot's hands, once more allowed its master to prove its identity; and whilst our bourgeois accomplished this examination, the treasurer tucked up his gown into his belt, and prepared himself.

All the friars, animated with the *esprit de corps*, formed a circle round the professor and the pupil.

Gorenflot leaned towards the ear of his friend,—

'Tis quite as amusing as chanting vespers, is it not?' he said innocently.

'So say the light horse,' replied Chicot, with the same simplicity.

The two combatants put themselves on guard. Borromée, dry and nervous, had the advantage of height, he also had that of experience and maturity.

Fire seemed to sparkle from the eyes of Jacques, and his cheeks betrayed his excitement by their flushed appearance.

By degrees, the religious mask of Borromée fell off, as, foil in hand, carried away by the entrancing action of the trial of skill, he transformed himself into a man of arms; he interlarded every coup with some exhortation, some advice, or some reproach; but the strength, activity, the spring of Jacques, frequently triumphed over the address of his master, and brother Borromée received the 'button' full on the breast.

Chicot devoured with his eyes this spectacle, and reckoned the points.

When the onset was concluded, or rather, when the fencers made a first pause,—

'Jacques has touched six times,' said Chicot; 'brother Borromée, nine; 'tis very good for a scholar, but 'tis not enough for the master.'

A flash, unperceived by all except Chicot, shot from the eyes of Borromée, and revealed a fresh trait in his character.

'Good,' thought Chicot; 'he is proud.'

'Monsieur,' replied Borromée, in a voice which with some difficulty he contrived to render soft, 'the exercise of arms is very rough for every one, but especially for poor friars like ourselves.'

'No matter,' said Chicot, determined to push Maitre Borromée to his last refuge; 'the master ought not to have less than half the advantage of his pupil.'

'Ah! Monsieur Briquet,' said Borromée, pale, and biting his lips, 'you are very absolute, it seems to me.'

'Good; he is angry,' thought Chicot, 'two mortal sins; they say that one alone is enough to curse a man; I have a good game.' And then, aloud,—

'And if Jacques was a little more calm, I am certain he would prove your equal.'

'I do not think so,' said Borromée.

'Well, for my part, I am sure of it.'

'Monsieur Briquet, who can use a weapon,' said brother Borromée, in a bitter tone, 'would measure the strength of Jacques by his own, perhaps; he would render a better account of it then.'

'Oh! I am old,' said Chicot.

'Yes, but skilful,' said Borromée.

'Ah! you are jesting,' thought Briquet; 'wait, wait. But,' he continued, 'there is one thing which deprives my observation of its value.'

'Which?'

'Why, that brother Borromée, like a kind master, has, I am sure, allowed Jacques to touch out of complaisance.'

'Ah, ah!' said Jacques, in his turn, knitting his brow.

'No, certainly,' said Borromée, restraining himself, but exasperated beyond measure; 'I certainly love Jacques, but I do not ruin him with that sort of complaisances.'

'Tis strange,' said Chicot, as though talking to himself; 'I thought so; excuse me.'

'But you who talk,' said Borromée, 'try' your skill, Monsieur Briquet.'

'Oh! don't intimidate me,' said Chicot.

'Be easy, monsieur,' said Borromée, 'we shall be indulgent towards you. We know the laws of the church.'

'Heathen!' muttered Chicot.

'Come, Monsieur Briquet, one pass only.'

'Accept,' said Gorenflot, 'accept.'

'I will do you no injury, sir,' said Jacques, taking in his turn the part of his master, and wishing to have a little bout with Chicot; 'I have a very soft hand.'

'My dear child!' murmured Chicot, attaching on the young man an inexpressible regard which ended in a silent smile.

'Come, then,' he said, 'as all seem to wish it.'

'Ah! bravo!' exclaimed the friars, with the appetite of triumph.

'But I apprise you,' said Chicot, 'that I only accept three passes.'

'As you like, sir,' said Jacques.

And rising slowly from the bench on which he was seated, Chicot tightened his pourpoint, drew on his fencing glove, and fixed on his mask, with the agility of a tortoise catching flies.

'If this customer contrives to parry your straight thrusts,' whispered Borromée to Jacques, 'I will never again set to with you, I warn you.'

Jacques made a sign of the head, accompanied with a smile, that signified, 'Be easy, master.'

Chicot, with the same quietness, and the same circumspection, took his guard, lengthening his great arms and long legs, which, by a miracle of precision, he so disposed as to conceal their enormous spring and unusual development.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE LESSON

FENCING was not, at the time, of which we are endeavouring not only to narrate the events, but also to describe the manners and habits, what it is at the present day. The swords being sharp on both edges, they struck as often with the edge as with the point; besides, the left hand armed with a dagger was both offensive and defensive; the result was a number of wounds, or rather scratches, which in the real combat were a powerful motive of excitation. Quelus, losing his blood from eighteen wounds, still remained on his legs, continued to fight, and would not have fallen, if the nineteenth wound had not laid him on a bed, which he only left for the tomb.

Fencing (introduced from Italy, but still in its infancy) consisted, therefore, at this period, in a number of evolutions which considerably disarranged the fencer, and on ground chosen at hazard, must have encountered many obstacles in the least inequality of the ground.

It was not rare to see the fencer lengthen himself, shorten himself, spring to the right, spring to the left, rest with one hand on the ground; the dexterity, not only of the hand, but also of the legs, and the whole body, became one of the first conditions of the art.

Chicot did not appear to have learnt fencing at this school; he seemed rather to present the modern art, the whole superiority of which, and especially its gracefulness, is in the agility of the hands, and the almost immobility of the body. He stood erect and firm on both legs, with a nervous and supple wrist, and a sword that seemed like a pliant and flexible rush, from the point to the middle of the blade, and an inflexible steel, from the guard to the middle.

In the first passes, on seeing before him this man of bronze, whose wrist alone seemed living, brother Jacques became impatient, which produced on Chicot no other effect than to make him unbend his arm and his leg, on the least opening he discovered in the play of his antagonist; and we may imagine that with this habit of striking with the edge as often as the point, these openings were frequent. On each of these openings, his long arm

extended itself by three feet, and planted straight on the breast of the brother, a touch of the button, as methodical as if directed by mechanism, and not by an organ of uncertain and unequal flesh.

On each of these coups, Jacques, flushed with rage and emulation, made a spring backwards.

For about ten minutes, the youth displayed all the resources of his prodigious activity; he sprung like a tiger cat, he wriggled like a serpent, he glided under the bosom of Chicot, jumped to the right, to the left; but the latter, with his quiet manner and long arm, seized his opportunity, and whilst parrying the foil of his adversary, invariably sent the terrible button to its address.

Brother Borromée became pale with the crowd of passions which had lately excited him.

At length, Jacques rushed a last time on Chicot, who, seeing him unsteady on his legs, offered to him an opening which might tempt him; Jacques did not refuse it, and Chicot, parrying rapidly, displaced the poor pupil from the line of equilibrium, to such a point, that he lost countenance, and fell.

Chicot, immovable as a rock, had remained in the same place.

Brother Borromée bit his fingers till they bled.

'You did not tell us, sir, that you were a pillar of the fencing-school,' he said.

'He!' exclaimed Gorenflot, thunderstruck, but triumphant by a feeling of friendship easily to be understood; 'he! he never goes out!'

'I, a poor bourgeois,' said Chicot; 'I, Robert Briquet, a pillar of the fencing-school? Ah! monsieur the treasurer!'

'But, sir,' said Borromée, 'to handle a sword as you do, you must have exercised enormously.'

'Eh! mon Dieu! yes, sir,' replied Chicot, good humouredly; 'I have, in fact, sometimes taken up a sword; but in holding it, I have always observed one thing.'

'Which?'

'That for him who holds it, pride is a bad counsellor, and passion a bad assistant. Now listen, my little brother Jacques,' he added, 'you have a neat wrist, but you have neither head nor legs; you are quick, but you do not reason. In arms there are three essential things; first

the head, then the hand, and next the legs; with the first and second you might conquer, but by uniting all three, you might conquer always.'

'Oh! sir,' said Jacques, 'have a set to with brother Borromée; it will certainly be worth seeing.'

Chicot, scornful, was about to refuse the proposition; but he reflected that probably the treasurer would, in his pride, take some advantage of it.

'Be it so,' he said, 'and if brother Borromée consents, I am at his orders.'

'No, sir,' replied the treasurer, 'I should be beaten; I prefer admitting it, rather than proving it.'

'Oh! how modest he is, how amiable he is!' said Gorenflot.

'You are mistaken,' replied the unmerciful Chicot to him in a whisper, 'he is mad with vanity; at his age, if I had such an opportunity, I would have asked on my knees for a lesson like the one Jacques has received.'

Thus saying, Chicot assumed his round shoulders, circumflexed legs, his eternal grimace, and returned to his seat on the bench.

Jacques followed him; admiration triumphed in the young man over the shame of his defeat.

'Give me some lessons, Monsieur Robert,' he said; 'the lord prior will permit it, will he not, your reverence?'

'Yes, my child,' replied Gorenflot, 'with pleasure.'

'I would not be in the way of your master, my friend,' said Chicot, and he saluted Borromée.

'I am not the sole master of Jacques,' replied the latter; 'I do not alone teach arms here; not having alone the honour, permit me not to have alone the defeat.'

'Who is his other professor, then?' demanded Chicot, observing in Borromée the reddening that betrayed the fear of having committed an imprudence.

'Why, no one,' said Borromée, 'no one.'

'Yes, yes,' said Chicot, 'I heard perfectly. Who is your other master, Jacques?'

'And, yes, yes,' said Gorenflot, 'a short fat man you presented to me, Borromée, and who comes here sometimes; a good figure, and drinks agreeably.'

'I do not remember his name,' said Borromée.

Brother Eusebius, with his satisfied mien, and his knife passed through his belt, advanced innocently.

'I know him,' he said.

Borromée signed to him repeatedly, but he did not observe him.

“Tis Maître Bussy Leclerc,” he continued, “who has been a professor of arms at Brussels.”

‘Ah!’ said Chicot, ‘Maître Bussy Leclerc! a fine blade, my faith!’

And while saying this with all the simplicity he was capable of, Chicot caught, in its transit, the furious glance which Borromée darted upon the unlucky, but complaisant cuisinier.

‘Stay, I did not know he was called Bussy Leclerc. They had forgotten to inform me of it,’ said Gorenflot.

‘I did not think the name would at all interest your lordship,’ said Borromée.

‘In fact,’ said Chicot, ‘one master of arms or another, it mattered not, provided he was a good one.’

‘In fact, it mattered not,’ repeated Gorenflot, ‘provided he was a good one.’

And, thereupon, he took the way to the staircase of his apartment, followed by the general admiration.

The exercise had terminated.

At the foot of the staircase, Jacques repeated his request to Chicot, to the great displeasure of Borromée; but Chicot replied,—

‘I know not how to teach it, my friend; I did it quite alone, with reflection and practice; do as I have done.’

Gorenflot leant on Chicot, and majestically mounted the staircase.

‘I hope,’ he said, with pride, ‘that this is a house devoted to the King, and of some use, heim!’

‘Peste! I think so,’ said Chicot, ‘we see it plain, reverend prior, when we visit you.’

‘And all this in a month, in less than a month even.’

‘And done by you?’

‘Done by me, by myself alone, as you see,’ said Gorenflot, drawing himself up.

‘Tis more than I expected, my friend; and when I return from my mission——’

‘Ah! true, dear friend, let us talk of your mission.’

‘Much the more willingly, as I have a message, or rather a messenger, to send to the King before my departure.’

‘To the King, dear friend? a messenger? You correspond with the King, then?’

'Directly.'

'And you want a messenger, you say?'

'I want a messenger.'

'Will you have one of our brothers? It would be an honour to our convent if one of our brothers saw the King.'

'Assuredly.'

'I will place two of our best legs at your orders; but tell me, Chicot, how the King, who believed you dead——'

'I have already told you—I was only in a lethargy, and at the proper time I came to life again.'

'And to enter into favour?' demanded Gorenflot.

'More than ever,' said Chicot.

'In that case,' said Gorenflot, stopping him, 'you can say to the King, all that we are doing here for his interest.'

'I shall not fail to do so, my friend; I shall not fail, be assured.'

'Oh! dear Chicot,' exclaimed Gorenflot, who already saw himself a bishop.

'But first I have two things to demand of you.'

'What are they?'

'The first is money, which the King will return you.'

'Money,' exclaimed Gorenflot, rising with precipitation, 'my coffers are full.'

'You are very lucky, my faith,' said Chicot.

'Will you have a thousand crowns?'

'No; 'tis far too much, dear friend; I am modest in my tastes, humble in my desires; my title of ambassador does not make me proud, and I hide it rather than boast of it. A hundred crowns will suffice me.'

'There they are. And the second thing?'

'An equerry.'

'An equerry?'

'Yes; to accompany me; I am fond of society.'

'Ah! my friend, if I were still free as formerly,' said Gorenflot, sighing.

'Yes, but you are not so.'

'Grandeur chains me,' murmured Gorenflot.

'Alas!' said Chicot, 'we cannot have everything at once; not being enabled to have your honourable company, my dearest prior, I will content myself with that of the little brother Jacques.'

'Little brother Jacques?'

'Yes, that galliard pleases me.'

'And you are right, Chicot,' said Gorenflot; 'he is a rare subject, and will go far.'

'I shall first take him two hundred and fifty leagues, if you grant him to me.'

'He is yours, my friend.'

The prior rang a bell, at the sound of which appeared a brother domestic.

'Let brother Jacques ascend, and the brother charged with the journeys of the town.'

In about ten minutes both appeared at the door.

'Jacques,' said Gorenflot, 'I give you a mission extraordinary.'

'To me, lord prior?' said the young man, astonished.

'Yes, you will accompany Monsieur Briquet on a grand journey.'

'Oh!' exclaimed the young brother, like an enthusiastic novice, 'I, on a journey with M. Briquet; I at liberty! Ah! Monsieur Robert Briquet, we will practise every day—eh?'

'Yes, my child.'

'And I may carry my arquebus?'

'You shall carry it.'

Jacques bounded, and rushed from the room, crying for joy.

'As to the commission,' said Gorenflot, 'I beg you to give your orders. Advance, brother Panurge.'

'Panurge,' said Chicot, to whom this name recalled some thoughts which were not exempt from sweetness, 'Panurge?'

'Alas! yes,' said Gorenflot, 'I have chosen this brother, who is named, like the other, Panurge, that he might perform the journeys made by the other.'

'Our old friend is out of the service then?'

'He is dead,' said Gorenflot, 'he is dead.'

'Oh!' said Chicot, with commiseration, 'the fact is, he ought to be old.'

'Nineteen years, my friend, he was nineteen years old.'

'Tis a fact of remarkable longevity,' said Chicot; 'convents alone can present such examples.'

CHAPTER XXIV

THE PENITENT

PANURGE, thus announced by the friar, soon showed himself.

It was certainly not from his moral or physical configuration that he had been admitted to replace his defunct namesake, for never had a more intelligent figure been dishonoured by the application of the name of an ass.

It was a fox that brother Panurge resembled, with his little eyes, sharp nose, and protruding jaw.

Chicot regarded him for a moment, and during this moment, short as it was, he seemed to have appreciated at its value the messenger of the convent.

Panurge remained humbly at the door.

'Come here, monsieur the courier,' said Chicot; 'do you know the Louvre?'

'Yes, sir,' replied Panurge.

'And in the Louvre, do you know a certain Henri de Valois?'

'The King?'

'I know not whether he is really the King, in fact,' said Chicot; 'but, however, they are in the habit of thus naming him.'

'Tis with the King I shall have business?'

'Precisely, do you know him?'

'Well, Monsieur Briquet.'

'In that case, you will ask to see him.'

'They will allow me to reach——'

'As far as his valet de chambre; yes, your habit is a passport; His Majesty is very religious, as you know.'

'And what shall I say to the valet de chambre of His Majesty?'

'You will say you were sent by the ghost.'

'What ghost?'

'Curiosity is a villainous defect, brother.'

'Pardon.'

'You will say then that you were sent by the ghost.'

'Yes.'

'And that you wait for the letter.'

'What letter?'

'Again !'

'Ah ! true.'

'My reverend,' said Chicot, turning towards Gorenflot, 'decidedly, I liked the other Panurge best.'

'This is all I shall have to do ?' demanded the courier.

'You will add that the ghost will wait, following quietly the route to Charenton.'

'Tis on this route I shall have to rejoin you then ?'

'Precisely.'

Panurge walked towards the door, and raised the screen to go out. It struck Chicot that in accomplishing this movement, brother Panurge had unmasked a listener.

But the screen fell so rapidly, that Chicot was unable to assure himself whether that which he took for a reality, was not merely a vision.

The subtle mind of Chicot, soon led him to an almost certitude that it was brother Borromée who was listening.

'Ah ! you are listening,' he thought; 'so much the better—in that case I will speak that you may hear.'

'And so,' said Gorenflot, 'you are honoured with a mission from the King, dear friend.'

'Confidential, yes.'

'Which relates to politics, I presume ?'

'And I, also.'

'How, you do not know of what mission you are charged ?'

'I know that I carry a letter, that's all.'

'A state secret, no doubt ?'

'I think so.'

'And you have no doubt of it ?'

'We are sufficiently alone, that I may tell you what I think, are we not ?'

'Speak, I am a tomb respecting secrets.'

'Well, the King has at length decided upon assisting the Duke of Anjou.'

'Really ?'

'Yes, Monsieur de Joyeuse starts to-night for that purpose.'

'But you, my friend ?'

'I am going towards Spain.'

'And how do you travel ?'

'Oh ! as we used to, on foot, on horses, in carriages, just as it may happen.'

'Jacques will be a good travelling companion, and

you have done well to require him; he understands Latin, the little rascal.'

'I confess, for my part, he pleases me very much.'

'That is enough to induce me to give him to you; but I think, besides, that he will be a useful second, in case of an encounter.'

'Thank you, my friend. I have now nothing more to do, than to take my leave.'

'Adieu.'

'What are you doing?'

'I am preparing to give you my blessing.'

'Bah! between us,' said Chicot, 'tis useless.'

'You are right,' said Gorenflot, 'tis good for strangers.'

And the two friends tenderly embraced each other.

'Jacques!' cried the prior, 'Jacques!'

Panurge showed his pointed visage between the doorway.

'What! have you not yet started?' exclaimed Chicot.

'Pardon, sir!'

'Go instantly!' said Gorenflot; 'M. Briquet is in haste. Where is Jacques?'

Brother Borromée now appeared, gay and smiling.

'Brother Jacques!' repeated the prior.

'Brother Jacques is gone,' said the treasurer.

'How gone?' exclaimed Chicot.

'Did you not desire that some one should go to the Louvre, sir?'

'But it was brother Panurge,' said Gorenflot.

'Oh, fool that I am! I understood Jacques,' said Borromée, striking his forehead.

Chicot frowned; but Borromée's regret was apparently so sincere, that a reproach would have looked like cruelty.

'I will wait, then, till Jacques returns,' he said.

Borromée saluted, and frowned in his turn.

'A propos,' he said, 'I forgot to announce to the lord prior, and I even ascended for that purpose, that the unknown lady has arrived, and that she desires to have an audience of your reverence.'

Chicot opened his immense ears.

'Alone?' demanded Gorenflot.

'With an equerry.'

'Is she young?' said Gorenflot.

Borromée modestly hung down his head.

'Good, he is a hypocrite,' thought Chicot.

'She still seems young,' said Borromée.

'My friend,' said Gorenflot, turning towards the false Robert Briquet, 'you comprehend?'

'I comprehend,' said Chicot, 'and I leave you; I will wait in the next room, or in the court.'

'Just so, my dear friend.'

'It is some distance from hence to the Louvre, sir,' observed Borromée, 'and brother Jacques may be late, the more likely as the person to whom you have written may perhaps hesitate to confide a letter of importance to a youth.'

'You make this reflection somewhat late, brother Borromée.'

'I was not aware; if they had confided to me——'

'Very well, very well, I shall put my self *en route* slowly towards Charenton; send him, at whatever hour, to rejoin me on the road.'

And he went towards the staircase.

'Not that side, sir, if you please,' said Borromée hastily, 'the unknown lady ascends that way, and she is very desirous of meeting no one.'

'You are right,' said Chicot, smiling, 'I will descend by the little staircase.'

And he advanced towards a door leading to a small cabinet.

'And I,' said Borromée, 'shall have the honour of introducing the penitent to the reverend prior.'

'Just so,' said Gorenflot.

'You know the way,' said Borromée, seemingly ill at ease'

'Perfectly.'

And Chicot quitted by the small cabinet.

Next the cabinet came a room; the back staircase led to the landing place of this room.

Chicot had spoken the truth, he knew the way, but he did not recognise this room.

In fact, it was much changed since his last visit; from pacific, it had become warlike; the walls were hung with arms, the tables and consoles were loaded with sabres, swords, and pistols; every corner contained a nest of muskets and arquebuses.

Chicot stopped for a moment in this room; he wanted a moment to reflect.

'They hide from me Jacques; they hide from me the

lady; they push me through the back stairs, to leave the grand staircase free; the meaning of this is, that they wish to keep me away from the young monk, and conceal the lady from me, this is clear.

'I ought then, in good policy, to do exactly the contrary of what they wish me to do.

'Consequently, I shall wait the return of Jacques, and I will post myself in a position where I can see the mysterious lady.

'Oh! oh! here is a beautiful mail shirt, thrown in this corner, supple, fine, and exquisitely tempered.'

He lifted it, and admired it.

'I wanted exactly such a one,' he said; 'light as linen cloth; by far too narrow for the prior, really one would think the shirt was made for me; let us borrow it of Dom Modeste; I will restore it to him on my return.'

And Chicot quickly folded up the tunic, which he slid under his doublet.

He was fastening the last button when brother Borromée appeared on the threshold of the door.

'Oh! oh!' murmured Chicot, 'you again, but you arrive too late, my friend.'

And crossing his long arms behind his back, and leaning back, Chicot stood as if admiring the trophies.

'Monsieur Robert Briquet seeks some weapon for his use?' said Borromée.

'I, dear friend!' said Chicot, 'and what to do, mon Dieu, with a weapon?'

'Why, when you use one so well.'

'Theory, dear brother, theory, nothing more; a bourgeois like myself might be active with his legs and his arms; but what he wants, and that which he always will want, is the courage of a soldier. The foil looks elegantly enough in my hand; but brother Jacques, believe me, would make me jump from hence to Charenton, with the point of a sword.'

'Really,' said Borromée, half convinced by the innocent and good-humoured manner of Chicot, who, let us add, had made himself more round-shouldered, more twisted, and more squinting than ever.

'And, besides, I want wind,' continued Chicot; 'you have observed that I cannot bend; my legs are execrable, there is my principal defect.'

'Will you allow me to observe to you, sir, that this

defect is still much greater in travelling than in handling weapons.'

'Ah! you know that I travel,' said Chicot, negligently.

'Panurge informed me of it,' replied Borromée, red-denying.

'Stay, 'tis strange, I do not remember having spoken of that to Panurge; but no matter, I have no reason to conceal it. Yes, brother, I take a short journey; I am going to my own country, where I have some property.'

'Do you know, Monsieur Briquet, that you procure a very great honour for brother Jacques?'

'That of accompanying me?'

'In the first place, but in the next, of seeing the King.'

'Or his valet de chambre, for it is possible, and even probable, that brother Jacques will see nothing else.'

'You are a familiar at the Louvre?'

'Oh! one of the most familiar, sir; 'tis I who furnish the King and the young nobility of the court with cloth stockings.'

'The King?'

'I had already his custom when he was but Duke of Anjou. On his return from Poland, he remembered me, and made me furnisher to the court.'

'Tis a fine acquaintance you have there, Monsieur Briquet.'

'The acquaintance of His Majesty?'

'Yes.'

'All the world does not say so, brother Borromée.'

'Oh! the leaguers.'

'Every one is more or less at present.'

'You are but little, to a certainty.'

'I, why so?'

'When we are personally known to the King.'

'Eh! eh! I have my politics, like others,' said Chicot.

'Yes; but your policy is in harmony with that of the King?'

'Don't rely on that; we often dispute.'

'If you dispute, how does he entrust you with a mission?'

'A commission, you mean.'

'Mission or commission, matters little; one or the other implies confidence.'

'Peuh! provided that I know well how to take my measures, it is all a king requires.'

'Your measures?'

'Yes.'

'Political measures; measures of finance?'

'No, measures of cloth.'

'What?' said Borromée, stupefied.

'No doubt; you shall understand.'

'I am listening.'

'You know that the King made a pilgrimage to Notre-Dame de Chartres.'

'Yes, to obtain an heir.'

'Precisely. You know that there are sure means to arrive at the result sought for by the King?'

'It seems, at all events, that the King does not employ these means.'

'Brother Borromée!' said Chicot.

'What?'

'You perfectly know that it concerns the obtaining an heir to the crown by miracle, and not otherwise.'

'And this miracle they demand?'

'At Notre-Dame de Chartres.'

'Ah, yes, the shirt?'

'There then, that's it. The King took the chemise of this good Notre-Dame, and gave it to the Queen; so that in exchange for this shirt, he resolved to give her a robe similar to that of our lady of Toledo, which is, they say, the handsomest and richest *robe de vierge* that exists in the world.'

'So that you are going——'

'To Toledo, dear brother Borromée, to Toledo, to take the measure of this robe, and to get a similar one made.'

Borromée appeared to hesitate, whether he should believe or misbelieve Chicot on his word.

After mature reflection, we are authorised to think that he did not believe him.

'You consider, then,' continued Chicot, as though entirely ignorant of what was passing in the mind of the treasurer; 'you consider, then, that the company of men of the church would have been more agreeable to me under such circumstances. But time flies, and Maître Jacques cannot be long now. Besides, I will wait for him outside, at the Croix-Faubin for example.'

'I think it will be the best way,' said Borromée.

'You will have the goodness, therefore, to apprise him on his arrival?'

'Yes.'

'And you will send him to me ?'

'I will not fail to do so.'

'Thank you, dear brother Borromée; delighted at having made your acquaintance.'

They bowed to each other. Chicot left by the little staircase. Behind him, brother Borromée closed the door and bolted it.

'Come, come,' said Chicot, 'it is important, it seems, that I do not see the dame; this being the case—I must see her.'

And to put his project in execution, Chicot quitted the priory of the Jacobins as openly as possible, conversed a moment with the doorkeeper, and wended his way towards the Croix-Faubin, walking in the middle of the road.

But, arrived at the Croix-Faubin, he disappeared at the angle of a farm wall; and there, feeling sure that he might defy all the arguses of the priory, had they the eyes of a falcon like Borromée, he glided along the buildings, followed through a dry ditch, a hedge which doubled back; and, without being perceived, gained an elm-tree hedge, which extended itself exactly opposite the convent.

Arrived at this point, which presented to him a centre of observation, such as he wished, he seated himself, or rather lay down, and waited for brother Jacques to return to the convent, and the lady to leave it.

CHAPTER XXV

THE AMBUSCADE

CHICOT, we have observed, was never long in taking his part. He resolved to wait, and that as conveniently as possible.

Through the thickness of the hedge he made himself a window, so that none of the comers and goers, who might interest him, could escape his view.

The road was deserted. As far as the eye of Chicot could reach, there appeared neither horseman, idler, or peasant. All the crowd of the previous evening had vanished with the spectacle that had produced it.

Chicot then saw nothing, but a man rather shabbily

dressed, who continued walking across the road, and taking measures with a long pointed stick, on the road of His Majesty the King of France.

Chicot had absolutely nothing to do. He was enchanted at having found this worthy man to serve him as a subject of contemplation.

'What is he measuring? Why is he measuring?' These were, for a few minutes, the most serious reflections of Maître Robert Briquet.

He resolved, therefore, not to lose sight of him.

Unfortunately, at the moment when, arrived at the end of his measure, the man was about to raise his head, a more important discovery absorbed his attention, by compelling him to raise his eyes in another direction.

The window of Gorenflot's balcony opened wide, and there appeared the respectable rotundity of Dom Modeste, who, with his large wide-spreading eyes, his holiday smile, and his most gallant ceremony, led forth a lady, almost buried under a mantle of velvet trimmed with fur.

'Oh! oh!' said Chicot to himself, 'here's the penitent. Her appearance is young; let us look at the head a little there, good, turn yourself a little more on this side; capital! It is really singular that I find resemblances in every figure I see. 'Tis an unhappy mania I have! Good, there's the equerry now; oh! oh! as for him, I am not deceived, 'tis Mayneville himself. Yes, yes, the curled moustache, the sword à coquille, 'tis himself. But let us reason a little; if I am not deceived about Mayneville, ventre de biche! why should I be deceived about Madame Montpensier? For this woman, eh, yes! morbleu! 'tis the duchess.'

Chicot, we may believe, from this moment abandoned the man with the measure, that he might not lose sight of the two illustrious personages.

In about a minute, he saw appear behind them, the pale face of Borromée, whom Mayneville frequently questioned.

'Just so,' said he, 'all the world's alike; bravo, conspire, 'tis the fashion; but, the devil! would the duchess by chance become a pensioner of Dom Modeste, she who has already a house at Bel Esbat, a hundred paces hence?'

At this moment the attention of Chicot received a fresh motive of excitement. Whilst the duchess conversed with

Gorenflot, or rather made him talk, M. de Mayneville made a sign to some one without.

Chicot, however, had seen no one, except the man who was measuring.

It was, however, to him the sign was made; and the result was, that the man of measures measured no longer. He stopped opposite the balcony, with his face turned towards Paris.

Gorenflot continued his amiabilities with the penitent.

M. de Mayneville whispered a few words into the ear of Borromée, and the latter instantly commenced gesticulating behind the prior, in a mode unintelligible to Chicot, but clear, as it appeared, to the measuring man, for he went away, posted himself in another place, where a fresh sign from Borromée and Mayneville nailed him like a statue.

After remaining thus for a few moments, upon a sign from brother Borromée, he commenced a species of exercise, which the more preoccupied Chicot, as it was impossible for him to divine the object. From the position he occupied, the man of measures commenced running towards the door of the priory, whilst M. de Mayneville held his watch in his hand.

'The devil! the devil!' murmured Chicot, 'all this appears to me suspicious; the enigma is well put, but well put as it is, perhaps, on seeing the face of the man of measures I shall guess it.'

At this moment, as if the familiar demon of Chicot had resolved to grant his wish, the man turned round, and Chicot recognised in him Nicholas Poulain, lieutenant of the provost, the same to whom he had, the previous evening, sold his armour.

'Come,' said he, 'vive la ligue! I have seen enough now, to guess the rest with a little trouble. Well, be it so, we will work.'

After a short conference between the duchess, Gorenflot, and Mayneville, Borromée closed the window, and the balcony was left deserted.

The duchess and her equerry quitted the priory to enter the litter that awaited them. Dom Modeste, who had accompanied them as far as the door, exhausted himself in reverences.

The duchess still held open the curtains of the litter to reply to the compliments of the prior, when a Jacobin

friar, quitting Paris by the gate Saint Antoine, came to the head of the horses, which he regarded with curiosity; then to the side of the litter, into which he gazed.

Chicot recognised in the monk, little brother Jacques, returned at great speed from the Louvre, and resting in ecstasy before Mme. de Montpensier.

'Come, come,' said he, 'I have some chance. If Jacques had returned sooner I should not have seen the duchess, compelled as I was to run to my rendezvous at the Croix-Faubin. Now, here is Madame de Montpensier gone, after arranging her little conspiracy; 'tis the turn of Maître Nicholas Poulain. That one I will expedite in ten minutes.'

In fact, the duchess, after passing in front of Chicot, without seeing him, rolled towards Paris, and Nicholas Poulain prepared to follow her.

Like the duchess, he had to pass in front of the hedge occupied by Chicot.

Chicot observed him coming, as the hunter sees the beast approach, ready to draw upon him when within shot.

When Poulain had arrived within reach of Chicot, Chicot drew.

'Eh! my good man,' he said from his hole, 'a look this way, if you please.'

Poulain started, and turned his head towards the ditch.

'You saw me; very well!' continued Chicot. 'Now, don't look like nothing, Maître Nicholas Poulain.'

The provost's lieutenant bounded like a deer at the report of a gun.

'Who are you?' he said, 'and what do you desire?'

'Who am I?'

'Yes.'

'I am one of your friends, fresh, but intimate; what do I want, ah, ça! 'tis a little too long to explain to you.'

'But, again, what do you want? Speak.'

'I desire that you come to me.'

'To you?'

'Yes, here; that you come down into the ditch.'

'What to do?'

'You shall know; but first descend.'

'Why?'

'And that you seat yourself with your back to this hedge.'

'What next?'

'Without looking towards me; without appearing to doubt who I am.'

'Sir?'

'Tis exacting much, I know it well, but what would you have? Maître Robert Briquet has a right to be exacting.'

'Robert Briquet!' exclaimed Poulain, executing at the same moment the manoeuvre commanded.

'There, well, sit down, that's it. Ah! ah! it seems we take our little dimensions on the road of Vincennes.'

'I?'

'Without doubt; after that, what is there astonishing that a lieutenant of the provost does the office of a surveyor of the highways when the occasion presents itself?'

'It's true,' said Poulain, a little reassured, 'you see, I was measuring.'

'Much the more so, as you performed under the eyes of three illustrious personages.'

'Of three illustrious personages? I do not comprehend.'

'How! you are ignorant?'

'I do not know what you mean.'

'That lady and gentlemen who were on the balcony, and who have taken their way to Paris. You do not know who they are?'

'I swear to you.'

'Ah! how lucky it is for me to have to inform you of such rich news. Figure to yourself, Monsieur Poulain, that you had for admirers, in your office of surveyor, Madame the Duchess of Montpensier, and M. the Count de Mayneville. Don't move, if you please.'

'Monsieur,' said Nicholas Poulain, attempting to struggle, 'these propositions—the ceremony with which you address me—'

'If you budge, my dear Monsieur Poulain,' continued Chicot, 'you will drive me to some extremity. Keep yourself tranquil, therefore.'

Poulain heaved a sigh.

'There, good,' continued Chicot, 'I was telling you, then, that coming to work in this manner under the eyes of these personages, and not having been remarked for it, it was

you who pretended thus; I was saying then, my dear sir' it would be very advantageous for you if another illustrious personage, the King, for example, remarked you.'

'The King?'

'His Majesty, yes, Monsieur Poulain; he is quite inclined, I assure you, to admire all sorts of work, and to recompense every trouble.'

'Oh! Monsieur Briquet, for pity's sake.'

'I repeat to you, dear Monsieur Poulain, that if you move, you are a dead man; remain quiet, therefore, to avoid this disgrace.'

'But what do you want of me then, in the name of Heaven?'

'Your good, nothing else; have I not told you I was your friend?'

'Sir!' exclaimed Poulain, in despair, 'I really know not what injury I have done His Majesty, yourself, or any one in the world!'

'Dear Monsieur Poulain, you will explain yourself to the proper person; this is not my business. I have my own ideas, you see, and I hold to them; these ideas are, that His Majesty will not approve that his lieutenant of the provost should obey, when he performs the functions of surveyor, the signs and indications of M. de Mayneville. Who knows, besides, that the King may not find it improper, that his lieutenant of the provost has omitted to state in his daily report, that Madame de Montpensier and M. de Mayneville entered yesterday morning the good city of Paris? nothing but that. Stay, Monsieur Poulain, you will certainly get embroiled with His Majesty.'

'Monsieur Briquet, an omission is not a crime, and certainly His Majesty is too enlightened.'

'Dear Monsieur Poulain, you invent chimeras, I think; I see more clearly myself through this affair.'

'What do you see?'

'A strong and handsome cord.'

'Monsieur Briquet?'

'Listen then, the devil! with a new rope, four soldiers at the four cardinal points, not a few Parisians round the scaffold, and a certain lieutenant of my acquaintance at the end of the cord.'

Nicholas Poulain trembled so strongly, that he shook the whole hedge.

'Sir!' he said, joining his hands.

'But I am your friend, dear Monsieur Poulain,' continued Chicot, 'and in this quality of friend, here is a piece of advice I will give you——'

'Advice?'

'Yes, very easy to follow, thank God! You will go from this spot, from this spot, do you understand? and find——'

'And find,' interrupted Nicholas Poulain, full of anguish, 'find whom?'

'A moment, let me reflect,' said Chicot; 'find—M. d'Epernon.'

'M. d'Epernon! the King's friend?'

'Precisely; you will take him aside.'

'M. d'Epernon?'

'Yes, and you will recount to him all the affair of measuring the road.'

'Is it a folly, sir?'

'Tis wisdom, on the contrary, supreme wisdom.'

'I do not comprehend.'

'Tis clear, however. If I denounce you, purely and simply as a man of measures, and the man of cuirasses, they will hang you on a tree; if, on the contrary, you perform your part well, you will be loaded with rewards and honours. You do not appear convinced; 'tis strange, it will give me the trouble of returning to the Louvre; but my faith! I will go just the same; there is nothing I would not do for you.'

And Nicholas Poulain heard the noise made by Chicot in disturbing the branches by rising.

'No, no,' he said; 'remain here, I will go.'

'Very well; but you understand, dear Monsieur Poulain, no subterfuges, for to-morrow, I shall send a short note to the King, of whom I have the honour, such as you see me, or rather such as you do not see me, of being the intimate friend; so in order that you may not be hung until the day after to-morrow, you will be hung higher and shorter.'

'I go, sir,' said the lieutenant, prostrated; 'but you strangely abuse——'

'I?'

'Oh!'

'Eh! dear Monsieur Poulain, raise altars to me; you were a traitor five minutes ago, I make of you the

preserver of your country. A propos, run quick, dear Monsieur Poulain, for I am in a great hurry to get from hence; and yet I cannot do so until you are gone. Hôtel d'Epernon, don't forget.'

Nicholas Poulain rose, and with the countenance of a man in despair, shot like an arrow in the direction of the Saint Antoine gate.

'Ah! it was time,' said Chicot, 'for, here they are leaving the priory. But it is not my little Jacques.'

'Eh, eh!' said Chicot, 'who is this rogue, cut as the architect of Alexander would have cut Mount Athos? *Ventre de biche!* he's a very large dog to accompany a little cur like myself.'

And seeing this emissary of the prior, Chicot hastened to reach the Croix-Faubin, the place of rendezvous.

As he was compelled to arrive at it by a roundabout way, the straight line had an advantage over him in rapidity; the giant monk, who strode over the ground at a swift pace, arrived first at the cross.

Chicot, besides, lost a little time in examining, whilst walking, his man, whose physiognomy he had not the least recollection of.

In fact, he was a veritable Philistine, was this monk. In the haste he had made to join Chicot, his Jacobin robe had not been closed, and through a crevice were seen his muscular limbs muffled up in hose quite laical.

His hood, but half thrown back, discovered a head of hair over which the scissors of the priory had not yet passed.

In addition, a certain expression of religious mockery, contracted the indented angles of his mouth; and when he passed from a smile to a laugh, he exhibited three teeth which looked like palisades planted behind the rampart of his thick lips.

Arms as long as those of Chicot, but stouter, shoulders capable of lifting the gates of Gaza, a large kitchen-knife passed through the band of his waist; such were, with a bag or wallet rolled like a buckler round his breast, the arms offensive and defensive of this Goliath of the Jacobins.

'Decidedly,' said Chicot, 'he is very ugly, and if he does not bring me good news with a head like that, I shall consider such a creature very useless on the earth.'

The monk, seeing Chicot approaching, saluted him almost militarily.

'What do you want, my friend ?' said Chicot.

'You are M. Robert Briquet ?'

'In person.'

'In that case I have a letter for you from the reverend prior.'

'Give it me.'

Chicot took the letter; it was conceived in these terms :—

'MY DEAR FRIEND,—I have much reflected since our separation; it is really impossible that I can leave to the devouring wolves of the world, the lamb confided to me by the Almighty. I speak, as you will comprehend, of our little Jacques Clement, who has just been received by the King, and has perfectly acquitted himself of your message.

'In lieu of Jacques, whose age is still tender, and whose services are due to the priory, I send you a good and worthy brother of our community; his manners are mild, and his humour innocent. I am sure you will be pleased with him as a travelling companion.'

'Yes, yes,' thought Chicot, glancing at the monk, 'reckon upon that.' And he continued :—

'I join my benediction to this letter, and I regret the not having given it to you in person.

'Adieu, dear friend.'

'Very fine handwriting,' said Chicot, when he had finished reading it. 'I will engage that this letter was written by the treasurer; he writes a superb hand.'

'It was, in fact, brother Borromée who wrote the letter,' said the monk.

'Well, in that case,' my friend,' said Chicot, smiling agreeably to the Goliath, 'you will return to the priory.'

'I ?'

'Yes, and you will say to his reverence, that I have changed my mind, and that I intend to travel alone.'

'What! you will not take me, monsieur ?' said the monk, with an astonishment that had something of a menace in it.

'No, my friend, no.'

'And why so, if you please ?'

'Because I must be economical; times are hard, and you would eat enormously.'

The monk showed his three defenders.

'Jacques eats quite as much as I do,' he said.

'Yes, but Jacques was a monk,' said Chicot.

'Well, and what am I then ?'

'You, my friend, you are a lansquenet or a gendarme; which, between ourselves, might scandalise the Notre-Dame, to whom I am deputed.'

'What do you mean by lansquenet and gendarme ?' replied the monk; 'I am a Jacobin; is not my robe recognisable ?'

'The frock does not make the monk, my friend,' replied Chicot; 'but the sword makes the soldier; tell that to brother Borromée, if you like.'

And Chicot made his bow to the giant, who re-took his way to the priory, grumbling like a hunted dog.

As to our traveller, he allowed his intended companion to disappear, and when he saw him received into the great door of the priory, he hid himself behind a hedge, took off his doublet, and passed the fine mail shirt over his linen shirt.

His toilet finished, he cut across the fields to regain the road to Charenton.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE GUISES

IN the evening of the day on which Chicot started for Navarre, we shall again find in the grand hall of the Hôtel de Guise, into which we have already, in our preceding details, more than once conducted our readers; we shall again find, we say, in the grand hall of the Hôtel de Guise, that little young man with the quick eye, whom we saw enter Paris on the croup of the horse of Carmainges, and who was no other, as we are aware, than the pretty penitent of Dom Gorenflot.

On this occasion she had observed no precaution to conceal either her person or her sex. Madame de Montpensier, habited in an elegant robe with an open collar,

her hair brilliant with the stars of diamonds, as was the fashion at this period, waited with impatience, standing in the embrasure of a window, some one who was late in coming.

Darkness was commencing, the duchess could scarcely distinguish the door of the hotel, upon which her eyes were constantly fixed.

At length the step of a horse resounded, and ten minutes after, the voice of the usher announced mysteriously to the duchess, 'M. the Duke de Mayenne.'

Madame de Montpensier rose and ran to meet her brother with such haste, that she forgot to walk on the point of the right foot, as was her habit when endeavouring not to appear lame.

'Alone, my brother,' she said, 'you are alone?'

'Yes, my sister,' said the duke, seating himself, after kissing the hand of the duchess.

'But Henry—where is Henry then? Do you know that all expect him here?'

'Henry, my sister, has not yet anything to do at Paris, whilst, on the contrary, he has still much to do in Flanders and Picardy. Our labour is slow and subterranean, we have work yonder. Why should we quit this work to come to Paris, where all is concluded?'

'Yes; but where all will be deferred, if you do not hasten.'

'Bah!'

'Bah! as much as you like, brother; I tell you, that the bourgeois are no longer content with all these reasons; let them see their duke Henry, this is their thirst, their delirium.'

'They shall see him at the proper time; has not Mayneville explained all this to them?'

'Undoubtedly; but you are aware, his voice goes not so far as yours.'

'I am much pressed, my sister—and Salcède?'

'Dead.'

'Without speaking?'

'Without breathing a word.'

'Good! and the arming?'

'Finished.'

'Paris?'

'Divided into sixteen sections.'

'And each section has the chief we designated.'

'Yes.'

'Let us live in peace then. Pasque Dieu ! 'tis what I say to the good bourgeois.'

'They will not listen to you.'

'Bah !'

'I tell you that they are bedevilled.'

'My sister, you are a little too much in the habit of judging of the precipitation of others, by your own impatience.'

'Do you make it a serious reproach to me ?'

'God forbid ! but what my brother Henry says, ought to be executed. And my brother Henry wishes that they in no wise hurry things.'

'What is to be done then ?' demanded the duchess with impatience.

'Does anything need haste, sister ?'

'All, if they like.'

'Which to commence with, in your opinion ?'

'By taking the King.'

'This is your decided opinion. I do not say it is bad if we could put it in execution, but to project and perform are two very different affairs; remember how many times we have already failed.'

'Times are changed. The King has no longer any one to defend him.'

'No, except the Swiss, the Scotch, the French guards.'

'My brother, when you like, I, I who speak to you, will show you the high road, escorted simply by two lackeys.'

'I have been told this a hundred times, and have not seen it once.'

'You will see it then, if you remain in Paris but three days.'

'Again, a project !'

'A plan, you mean.'

'Be good enough to communicate it to me, in that case.'

'Oh ! 'tis a woman's idea, and therefore it will make you laugh.'

'God forbid I should wound your pride of inventor ! let us hear the plan.'

'You are laughing at me, Mayenne ?'

'No, I am listening.'

'Well ! in four words, here it is——'

At this moment the usher raised the tapestry.

'Does it please your highness to receive M. de Mayneville?' he inquired.

'My accomplice,' said the duchess, 'let him enter.'

M. de Mayneville entered, and kissed the hand of the Duke de Mayenne.

'One word, monseigneur,' he said, 'I arrive from the Louvre.'

'Well!' exclaimed at once Mayenne and the duchess.

'They suspect your arrival.'

'How so?'

'I was conversing with the post-master of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois, when two Gascons passed.'

'Did you know them?'

'No, they were all flaming new. 'Cap de Bious!' said one, 'you have a magnificent doublet there; but which on a pinch will not render you the same service as your yesterday's cuirass.'

'Bah, bah! solid as may be the sword of M. de Mayenne,' said the other, 'we will engage its cuts no deeper into the satin, than it would into the cuirass.'

'And thereupon the Gascons gave way to bravadoes, which indicated that they knew of your being near.'

'And to whom do these Gascons belong?'

'I know nothing about them.'

'And they retired?'

'Ah! not thus. They cried aloud, the name of your highness was heard; some passers-by stopped, and plainly inquired if you had arrived; they were about replying to the question, when suddenly a man approached the Gascon, and touched him on the shoulder. Either I am much deceived, monseigneur, or this man was Loignac.'

'What then?' demanded the duchess.

'To a few words spoken in his ear, the Gascon only replied by a sign of submission, and followed his interrupter.'

'So that?'

'So that I could learn no more. But in the meantime be upon your guard.'

'You did not follow them?'

'I did, but at a distance; I feared being recognised as a gentleman of your highness. They directed their steps towards the Louvre, and disappeared behind the Hôtel des Meubles; but after them a whole train of voices repeated, "Mayenne, Mavenne!"'

'I have a very simple method of replying,' said the duke.

'Which ?' demanded his sister.

'To go and bow to the King this evening.'

'Salute the King ?'

'Undoubtedly; I come to Paris, I bring him news from his good towns of Picardy. There can be no objection to it.'

'The method is a good one,' said Mayneville.

'It is imprudent,' said the duchess.

'It is indispensable, my sister, if indeed they suspect my arrival in Paris. It was also the opinion of our brother Henry, that I should dismount, booted and spurred, at the Louvre, to present to the King the homages of all the family; once this duty accomplished, I am free, and can receive whom I please.'

'The members of the committee, for example; they await you.'

'I will receive them at the Hotel Saint Denis, on my return from the Louvre,' said Mayenne. 'Let them bring my horse, therefore, Mayneville, without rubbing him down, and just as he is; you will come with me to the Louvre; you, my sister, will wait for us, if you please.'

'Here, my brother ?'

'No, at Saint Denis, where I have left my carriages, and where they suppose I sleep. We shall be there in two hours.'

CHAPTER XXVII

AT THE LOUVRE

ON this day also, for some great adventures, the King left his cabinet, and inquired for M. d'Epéron.

It might be midday.

The duke hastened to obey, and passed to the King.

He found His Majesty on his legs in an antechamber, contemplating with considerable attention a young monk, who blushed and hung down his head at the piercing regard of the King.

The King took d'Epéron aside.

'Look, then, duke,' he said, pointing to the young man, 'at the droll figure of a monk there.'

'At what is your Majesty astonished ?' said d'Epernon; 'I think the figure a very ordinary one, myself.'

'Really ?'

And the King again contemplated him.

'What is your name ?' he said to him.

'Brother Jacques, sire.'

'You have no other name ?'

'My family name ? Clement.'

'Brother Jacques Clement,' repeated the King.

'Does not your Majesty also find something strange in the name ?' said the duke, smiling.

The King made no reply.

'You have executed your commission well,' he said to the monk, without ceasing to contemplate him.

'What commission, sire ?' demanded the duke, with that boldness for which he was so often reproached, and which became a daily familiarity with him.

'Nothing,' replied Henry; 'a little secret between myself and some one you do not know, or rather whom you no longer know.'

'In truth, sire,' said d'Epernon, 'you regard the child strangely, and you embarrass him.'

'It's true, yes; I know not why my eyes cannot keep from him; it seems to me that I have already seen him, or that I shall see him. He has appeared to me in a dream, I think; well, well, I am getting out of reason. Go, little monk, you have completed your mission; we shall send the letter requested to him who requires it. Be easy, d'Epernon.'

'Sire !'

'Let them give him ten crowns.'

'Thank you,' said the monk.

'One would think you said "Thank you," with the points of your teeth,' observed d'Epernon, who could not comprehend how a monk could despise ten crowns.

'I say "thank you," with the points of my teeth,' replied little Jacques, 'because I would much prefer one of those handsome Spanish knives which are appended to the wall there.'

'How ! you do not prefer money, to visit the buffoons of the fair Saint Laurent, or the rabbit fanciers of the Rue Sainte Marguerite ?' said d'Epernon.

'I have made a vow of poverty and chastity,' replied Jacques.

'Give him one of those Spanish blades then, and let him go, La Valette,' said the King.

The duke, like a parsimonious man, chose amongst the swords the one which appeared to him the least rich, and gave it to the monk.

It was a small Catalonian sword, solidly set in a handle of handsomely cut horn.

Jacques took it, delighted at possessing so good a weapon, and retired.

When the monk had left, the duke attempted again to question the King.

'Duke,' interrupted the King, 'have you amongst the forty-five two or three men who know how to mount a horse?'

'A dozen at least, sire, and they will all be cavaliers in a month.'

'Choose two to your hand, and let them speak with me this moment.'

The duke bowed and retired, and called Loignac into the antechamber.

Loignac appeared in a few seconds.

'Loignac,' said the duke, 'send to me this instant two stout horsemen; 'tis to accomplish a mission direct from His Majesty.'

Loignac hastily traversed the gallery, arrived at the building, which we shall henceforth name the lodging of the forty-five, he there opened the door and called with the voice of a master :—

'Monsieur de Carmainges !

'Monsieur de Biran !'

'M. de Biran is gone out,' said the functionary.

'How ! gone out without permission ?'

'He is studying the quarter recommended to him by Monseigneur the Duke d'Epernon this morning.'

'Very well ! call Monsieur de Sainte Maline, then.'

The two names resounded through the vaults, and the chosen pair soon appeared.

'Messieurs,' said Loignac, 'follow me to M. the Duke d'Epernon.'

And he conducted them to the duke, who, dismissing Loignac, led them to the King.

On a sign from His Majesty, the duke retired, and the two young men remained,

It was the first time they had been in the presence of the King.

The appearance of the King was very imposing; their emotion betrayed itself in different modes: Sainte Maline had a brilliant eye, firm muscle, and a prim moustache; Carmainges, pale, though quite as resolute, although less proud, dared not fix his regard on Henry.

'You belong to my forty-five gentlemen?' said the King.

'I have that honour, sire,' replied Sainte Maline.

'And you, sir?'

'I thought that monsieur replied for us both, sire; this was the reason I did not reply; but as to being at the service of your Majesty, I am as much so as any one.'

'Good! you will mount your horses and take the road to Tours; do you know it?'

'I will inquire,' said Sainte Maline.

'I shall go eastwardly,' said Carmainges.

'The better to guide you, pass first through Charenton.'

'Yes, sire.'

'You will push on until you encounter a man travelling alone.'

'Will your Majesty give us his description?' said Sainte Maline.

'A large sword by his side or at his back, long arms and long legs.'

'May we know his name, sire?' demanded Ernauton de Carmainges, whom the example of his companion induced, in spite of the etiquette, to question the King.

'He is called the ghost,' said Henry.

'We will ask the name of every traveller we meet, sire.'

'And we will search every hostelry.'

'When you have found and recognised the man, you will deliver him this letter.'

The two young men held out their hands at the same time.

The King remained a moment embarrassed.

'What is your name?' he inquired of one of them.

'Ernauton de Carmainges,' he replied.

'And you?'

'René de Sainte Maline.'

'Monsieur de Carmainges, you will carry the letter, and M. de Sainte Maline will deliver it.'

Ernauton took the precious deposit, and prepared to secure it in his doublet.

Sainte Maline arrested his arm at the moment the letter

was disappearing, and respectfully kissed the seal. He then handed the letter to Ernauton.

This flattery made the King smile.

'Come, come, gentlemen, I see I shall be well served.'

'Is this all, sire?' said Ernauton.

'Yes, gentlemen, only, a last recommendation.'

The young men bowed and attended.

'This letter, gentlemen,' said Henry, 'is more precious than the life of a man. On your heads, lose it not, deliver it secretly to the ghost, who will give you a receipt for it, which you will bring to me; and above all, travel as men who travel on their own business. Go.'

The two young men left the royal cabinet, Ernauton, overwhelmed with joy, Sainte Maline bursting with jealousy, the one with fire in his eyes, the other with an eager gaze that almost burnt the doublet of his companion.

M. d'Epéron waited for them; he wished to question them.

'Monsieur the Duke,' replied Ernauton, 'the King has not authorised us to speak.'

They went directly to the stables, where the King's huntsman delivered to them two roadsters, hardy and well equipped.

M. d'Epéron would certainly have followed them to learn more, had he not been apprised, at the moment Carmainges and Sainte Maline quitted him, that a man wished to speak with him instantly, and at any sacrifice.'

'What man?' demanded the duke impatiently.

'The lieutenant of the provost of the Isle of France.'

'Eh! parfondious!' he exclaimed, 'am I sheriff, provost, or knight of the watch?'

'No, monseigneur, but you are the friend of the King,' replied a modest voice at his left; 'I entreat you, by this title, to listen to me.'

The duke turned round.

Near him, hat in hand, was a poor attendant, who at every second passed from one shade of the rainbow to another.

'Who are you?' demanded the duke brutally.

'Nicholas Poulain, at your service, monseigneur.'

'And you wish to speak with me?'

'I ask that favour.'

'I have not the time.'

'Not even to hear a secret, monseigneur?'

'I hear a hundred every day, sir; yours will make a hundred and one; it will be one too many.'

'Even if it regarded the life of His Majesty?' said Nicholas Poulain, whispering in d'Epernon's ear.

'Oh, oh!' I am listening; come into my cabinet.'

Nicholas Poulain wiped his forehead, running with perspiration, and followed the duke.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE REVELATION

M. D'EPERNON, in crossing his anteroom, addressed one of the gentlemen in attendance.

'What is your name, sir?' he asked of an unknown face.

'Pertinax Montcrabeau, monseigneur,' replied the gentleman.

'Well, Monsieur de Montcrabeau, place yourself at my door, and let no one enter.'

'Yes, Monsieur the Duke.'

'No one, do you understand?'

'Perfectly.'

And Monsieur Pertinax, who was sumptuously dressed, and who *came* the beau in his orange stockings with a doublet of blue satin, obeyed the order of d'Epernon. He placed his back therefore against the wall, and took up a position, with his arms crossed, along the tapestry.

Nicholas Poulain followed the duke to his cabinet. He saw the door open and shut, then the screen drop before the door, and he began seriously to tremble.

'Let us hear your conspiracy, sir,' said the duke dryly; 'but for God's sake, let it be a good one, for I have a multitude of agreeable things to do to-day, and if I lose my time with you, beware.'

'Eh! Monsieur the Duke,' said Nicholas Poulain, 'it simply concerns the most frightful of crimes.'

'In that case let us know the crime.'

'Monsieur the Duke——'

'They would kill me—is it not so?' interrupted the duke, drawing himself up like a Spartan; 'well! be it so, my life belongs to God and my King; let them take it.'

'It does not concern you, monseigneur.'

'Ah! that surprises me.'

'It concerns the King. They would carry him off, monseigneur.'

'Oh! again, this old affair of carrying off,' said d'Epernon contemptuously.

'This time the affair is rather serious, Monsieur the Duke, if I believe appearances.'

'And on what day would they carry off His Majesty?'

'Monseigneur, the first time His Majesty goes to Vincennes in his litter.'

'How will they carry him off?'

'By killing his two squires.'

'And who will strike the blow?'

'Madame de Montpensier.'

'D'Epernon smiled.

'This poor duchess; what things they do attribute to her!'

'Less than she projects, monseigneur.'

'And she occupies herself about this at Soissons?'

'Madame the duchess is in Paris.'

'In Paris?'

'I can answer for it to monsieur.'

'You have seen her?'

'I have.'

'Which means that you thought you saw her?'

'I have had the honour of speaking to her.'

'The honour?'

'I am mistaken, Monsieur the Duke, the misfortune.'

'But my dear lieutenant, 'tis not the duchess who will carry off the King.'

'Pardon me, monseigneur.'

'Herself?'

'In person, with her assistants, be it understood.'

'And where will she place herself to preside at this abduction?'

'At a window of the priory of the Jacobins, which is, as you know, on the road to Vincennes.'

'What the devil are you telling me?'

'The truth, monseigneur. All the measures are taken that the litter may arrive at the moment she reaches the façade of the convent.'

'And who has taken these measures?'

'Alas!'

'Finish then—why—the devil !'

'I, monseigneur.'

D'Epernon stepped backward in astonishment.

'You ?' he said.

Poulain heaved a sigh.

'You are in it—you who denounce ?' continued d'Epernon.

'Monsiegnieur,' said Poulain, 'a faithful subject of the King ought to risk everything for his service.'

'In fact, mordieu ! you risk the cord.'

'I prefer death to baseness—or the death of the King; for this I am come.'

'These are fine sentiments, sir; and you must have grand reasons for them.'

'I thought, monseigneur, that you were the King's friend, that you would not betray me, and that you would turn to the profit of all, the revelation I have made.'

The duke regarded Poulain for some time, and steadily scrutinised the lineaments of his pale countenance.

'There must be something else,' he said; 'the duchess, resolute as she is, would not alone attempt such an enterprise.'

'She expects her brother,' replied Nicholas Poulain.

'The Duke Henry !' exclaimed d'Epernon, with the terror felt at the approach of the lion.

'Not the Duke Henry, monseigneur; the Duke de Mayenne only.'

'Ah !' said d'Epernon, breathing; 'but no matter; we must attend to all these grand projects.'

'Undoubtedly, monseigneur,' said Poulain; 'and 'tis on that account I have hastened.'

'If you have told the truth, monsieur the lieutenant; you shall be recompensed.'

'Why should I tell a lie, monseigneur ? Where is my interest ? I who eat the bread of the King, do I, yes or no, owe him my services ? I shall go to the King, therefore, if you do not believe me; and I will die, if necessary, to prove my words.'

'No, parafandious ! you will not go to the King. Understand, Maître Nicholas; and 'tis with me alone you have business.'

'Be it so, monseigneur; I only said this, as you seemed to hesitate.'

'No, I do not hesitate; and first, there are a hundred crowns I owe you.'

'Monseigneur wishes it then to be for him alone.'

'Yes, I have emulation, I have zeal, and I keep the secret for myself. You yield it to me, do you not?'

'Yes, monseigneur.'

'With a warranty that it is a real secret?'

'Ah! with every warranty.'

'A thousand crowns will satisfy you, then—without reckoning the future.'

'I have a family, monseigneur.'

'Well; but a thousand crowns! parfondious!'

'And if they knew in Lorraine that I had made such a revelation, every word I have pronounced would cost me a pint of blood.'

'Poor dear man!'

'In case of misfortune, therefore, my family must live.'

'Well?'

'Well! this is the reason I accept the thousand crowns.'

'The devil take the explanation; what matters it to me for what motive you accept them, from the moment you do not refuse them? The thousand crowns then are yours.'

'Thank you, monseigneur.'

And seeing the duke approach a coffer, in which he plunged his hand, Poulain advanced behind him.

But the duke contented himself by drawing from the coffer a small book, on which he wrote in a gigantic and frightful hand:—

'Three thousand livres to M. Nicholas Poulain.'

So that it was impossible to understand whether he had given these three thousand livres, or whether he owed them.

'Tis exactly as if you held them, he said.

Poulain, who had advanced his hand and leg, withdrew his hand and leg, the which made him salute.

'So 'tis agreed,' said the duke.

'What is there agreed, monseigneur?'

'You will continue to inform me?'

Poulain hesitated; it was the trade of a spy, thus imposed upon him.

'Well!' said the duke; 'this supreme devotedness—is it already banished?'

'No, monseigneur.'

'I can reckon upon you, then ?'

Poulain made an effort.

'You may reckon upon it,' he said.

'And I, alone, know all this ?'

'You alone; yes, monseigneur.'

'Go, my friend, go; parfandious ! let M. de Mayenne look to himself.'

He pronounced these words on raising the tapestry to give passage to Poulain; and when he had seen the latter cross the anteroom and disappear, he hastened quickly to the King.

Henry, tired of playing with his dogs, was playing at cup and ball.

D'Épernon assumed an air of business and care, which the King, preoccupied with such an important work, did not even notice.

However, as the duke remained silent, the King raised his head, and looked at him for a moment.

'Well !' he said to him, 'what have we now, La Valette; let us hear—are you dead ?'

'Would to God, sire !' replied d'Épernon, 'I should not see what I am obliged to see.'

'What ? my cup and ball ?'

'Sire, in great perils, a subject might be alarmed for the safety of his master.'

'Danger again ? The black devil take you, duke !'

And, with a remarkable dexterity, the King caught the ivory ball on the fine point of his cup.

'But you are not aware of what is passing, then ?' said the duke.

'My faith, perhaps,' said the King.

'Your most cruel enemies surround you at this moment, sire !'

'Bah ! who then ?'

'The Duchess of Montpensier, in the first place.'

'Ah ! yes, it's true. She was present at the execution of Salcède, yesterday.'

'How can your Majesty say that ?'

'What is that to me ?'

'You know it, then ?'

'You see plainly that I know it, since I have told you of it.'

'But that M. de Mayenne is arrived—do you know that also ?'

'Since yesterday evening.'

'Eh! what! this secret!' said the duke, disagreeably surprised.

'Are there any secrets for kings, my dear?' said Henry negligently.

'But who could have informed you?'

'Do you not know that we princes obtain revelations?'

'Or a police.'

'Tis the same thing.'

'Ah! your Majesty has your police, and says nothing about it,' said d'Epéron, piqued.

'Parbleu! who will love me, then, if I do not love myself?'

'You do me wrong, sire.'

'If you are zealous, my dear La Valette, which is a great virtue, you are slow, which is a great defect. Your news would have been very good yesterday at four o'clock, but to-day——'

'Well, sire, to-day?'

'It arrives a little late, believe me.'

'Tis still too soon, sire, since you are not disposed to listen to me,' said d'Epéron.

'I! I have been listening to you for an hour.'

'What! you are threatened, attacked; they prepare ambuscades, and you do not stir yourself!'

'What to do, since you have given me a guard; and that yesterday you assured me my immortality was secured? You knit your brows! ah, ça! But are your forty-five returned to Gascony, or are they worth nothing? Is it with these gentlemen as with mules? the day we try them they are all fire; when purchased, walk backwards?'

'Tis well, your Majesty shall see what they are.'

'I shall not be sorry to do so; will it be soon, duke, that I shall see this?'

'Sooner than you may probably imagine, sire.'

'Good, you will frighten me.'

'You will see, you will see, sire. By the way, when do you go into the country?'

'To the wood?'

'Yes.'

'Saturday.'

'In three days then?'

'In three days.'

'It is sufficient, sire.'

D'Epernon bowed to the King, and left.

In the anteroom, he discovered that he had neglected to relieve M. de Pertinax of his post, but M. Pertinax had relieved himself.

CHAPTER XXIX

TWO FRIENDS

WE will now, if the reader pleases, follow the two young men whom the King, delighted at having his own little secrets, had sent as messengers to Chicot.

Scarcely on horseback, Ernauton and Sainte Maline, in the endeavour of each to prevent the other from being first, nearly ran foul of one another in passing the wicket.

In fact, the two horses, pushing forward, rubbed the knees of the two cavaliers one against the other.

The face of Sainte Maline became purple, that of Ernauton pale.

'You hurt me, sir,' cried the former, when they had cleared the gate; 'would you crush me then?'

'You hurt me as well,' said Ernauton, 'only that I do not complain.'

'You would give me a lesson, I think?'

'I wish to give you nothing at all.'

'Ah, ça!' said Sainte Maline, urging his horse that he might speak nearer to his companion; 'repeat these words to me.'

'Why so?'

'Because I do not understand them.'

'You seek a quarrel with me, is it not so?' said Ernauton phlegmatically; 'so much the worse for you.'

'And for what reason should I seek a quarrel with you? do I know you?' sharply replied Sainte Maline.

'You know me perfectly, sir,' said Ernauton; 'in the first place, because yonder from whence we come, my house is but two leagues from yours, and that I am known in the country as being of an old stock; in the next place, because you are furious at seeing me in Paris, when you thought yourself alone sent for; in the last place, because the King has given me the letter to carry.'

'Well, be it so,' exclaimed Sainte Maline, pale with rage;

'I accept it all as true. But there is one thing that results from it.'

'Which ?'

'That I find myself ill when with you.'

'Leave me then, if you like ; pardieu ! 'tis not I who retain you.'

'You appear as though you did not understand me.'

'On the contrary, sir, I understand you perfectly. You would like well enough to take from me the letter to carry it yourself. Unluckily you must kill me first.'

'Who tells you I have not a mind to do so ?'

'To will and to do are two things.'

'Dismount with me just to the water's edge, and you will see whether, as far as I am concerned, to will and to do, are more than one.'

'My dear sir, when the King gives me a letter to carry——'

'Well ?'

'Well, I carry it.'

'I will take it from you by force, coxcomb as you are.'

'You will not drive me, I hope, to the necessity of breaking your head, as I would that of a mad dog ?'

'You ?'

'Undoubtedly; I have a large pistol, you have none.'

'Ah ! you shall pay me for that,' said Sainte Maline, turning his horse aside.

'I hope so, really; after my commission is executed.'

'Schelme !'

'For the moment, observe yourself, I beg of you; Monsieur de Sainte Maline, for we have the honour of belonging to the King, and we should afford a bad opinion of the royal household by stirring up the people. And besides, think what a triumph for the enemies of His Majesty, in seeing discords amongst the defenders of his throne.'

Sainte Maline bit his gloves, the blood flowed under his ferocious teeth.

'There, there, sir,' said Ernauton; 'keep your hands to hold the sword when required.'

'Oh ! I shall burst,' cried Sainte Maline.

'In that case, the work will be already done for me,' said Ernauton.

We know not to what extent the still increasing rage

of Sainte Maline would have gone, had not Ernauton suddenly, on crossing the Rue Saint Antoine, near Saint Paul, seen a litter; he uttered a cry of surprise, and stopped to look at a woman half veiled.

'My page of yesterday,' he said.

The lady did not appear to recognise him, and passed without a frown, throwing herself back in the litter.

'Cordieu! you keep me waiting, I think,' said Sainte Maline; 'and that to look at the women.'

'I ask your pardon, sir,' said Ernauton, resuming his course.

The young men, from this time, followed at a good trot the Rue de Faubourg Saint Marceau; they spoke not a word, not even to quarrel.

Sainte Maline appeared calm enough outside; but, in reality, every muscle in his body still trembling with passion.

Besides, he had recognised, and this discovery did not tend to soften him, as we may easily imagine; he had recognised that, good cavalier as he was, he could not in any event follow Ernauton, his horse being very inferior to that of his companion, and already sweating, although he had not galloped.

This annoyed him greatly; so that to ascertain positively what his horse could achieve, he kept tormenting him with his whip and spur.

This persistence brought on a quarrel between him and his horse; this took place in the environs of the Bievre. The animal did not put himself to the expense of eloquence, as Ernauton had done; but remembering his origin (he was from Normandy), he sued out a process against his rider, in which the latter was cast.

He bounded across the road, reared, plunged forward, and bolted towards la Bievre, where he got rid of his cavalier, by rolling with him as far as the river, where they separated.

The imprecations of Sainte Maline might have been heard at the distance of a league, although half stifled by the water. When he had contrived to get upon his legs, his eyes nearly started from his head, and a few drops of blood, running from his wounded forehead, ran down his face.

Sainte Maline threw a glance round him; his horse had already remounted the sloping, and the only part of him

distinguishable was his tail, which indicated that his head was turned towards the Louvre.

Shaken as he was, covered with mud, soaked to the skin, all over blood and bruises, Sainte Maline admitted the impossibility of catching his beast, even to attempt it would have been a ridiculous manoeuvre.

It was now that the words he had spoken to Ernauton returned to his mind; if he would not wait for his companion a second, in the Rue Saint Antoine, why should his companion oblige him by waiting one or two hours on the road.

This reflection led Sainte Maline from rage to the most violent despair, especially when he saw, from the spot in which he was encased, the silent Ernauton spurring along an oblique road, which he no doubt judged to be the shortest.

Amongst men really passionate, the culminating point of anger results in some act of folly; some only reach delirium, others the total prostration of sense and strength.

Sainte Maline mechanically drew out his poniard; for a moment he had the idea of plunging it to the hilt in his bosom. What he suffered at this moment no one can say, not even himself. Such a crisis is death—or if we survive, we are ten years older.

He remounted the shelving of the river, by the aid of his hands and knees, till he arrived at the summit; having reached it, his wandering eye glaced at the road; there was nothing to be seen. To the right, Ernauton had disappeared, bearing himself forwards; at the bottom, his own horse had also made himself scarce.

Whilst Sainte Maline gave vent to his anger, a thousand sinister thoughts against himself and against others, the gallop of a horse struck his ear, and he saw debouch from the road on the right, taken by Ernauton, a horse and cavalier.

The rider held another horse by the bridle.

It was the result of the chase of M. de Carmainges; he had cut towards the right, knowing well, that to pursue a horse, was to double his activity from fear.

He had made a turn, therefore, and cut off the passage of the Normand, by waiting for him across a narrow street.

At this sight, the heart of Sainte Maline burst with joy; he felt an emotion of gratitude which gave a gentle

expression to his countenance, and suddenly his features became gloomy; he had comprehended all the superiority of Ernauton over himself, for he admitted that, in the place of his companion, he should not have had an idea of acting as he had done.

The nobleness of the action conquered him; he felt it, he measured it, and suffered from it.

He stammered out his thanks, to which Ernauton paid no attention; furiously seized the bridle of his horse, and, despite his bruises, mounted his saddle.

Ernauton, without saying a word, had preceded him, caressing his horse.

Sainte Maline, as we have said, was an excellent horseman; the accident of which he had been the victim was a surprise; after a momentary struggle, in which, this time, he had the advantage, becoming master of his horse, he put him into a trot.

'Thanks, sir,' he said a second time to Ernauton, after consulting a long while with his own pride, and the requisitions of society.

Ernauton contented himself with bowing, and touching his hat with his hand.

The route appeared long to Sainte Maline.

Towards half-past two o'clock they observed a man walking, escorted by a dog, he was tall, had a sword by his side; he was not Chicot, but he had arms and legs worthy of him.

Sainte Maline, still all over with mud, could not contain himself; he saw that Ernauton passed without taking the least notice of this man. The idea of finding his companion at fault, passed like an evil flash across the mind of the Gascon; he pushed towards the man and accosted him.

'Traveller,' he said, 'do you not expect something?'

The traveller looked at Sainte Maline, whose appearance at this moment, we must confess, was not over agreeable. His features discomposed by his recent anger, the half-dried mud on his clothes, the half-dried blood on his cheeks, large black frowning eyebrows, a nervous hand stretched towards him, with a menacing gesture, rather than an interrogation; all this looked suspicious to the pedestrian.

'I do expect something,' he said, 'that is not some one; if I expect some one, to a certainty that some one is not you.'

'You are very unpolite, my master,' said Sainte Maline, enchanted at finding, at length, an opportunity of giving vent to his anger; and also furious at seeing that, by being mistaken, he had furnished a fresh triumph to his adversary.

And at the same time he spoke, he raised his hand, armed with a switch, to strike the traveller; but the latter lifted his stick, and struck Sainte Maline a sharp blow on the shoulder; he then whistled to his dog, which bounding forward tore a piece of flesh from both horse and rider.

The horse, irritated with the pain, bolted forward a second time, it is true, but without being enabled to get rid of his rider, who, despite all his efforts, kept his seat.

Thus carried away, he overtook Ernauton, who observed him pass without even smiling at his misadventure.

When he had contrived to tame his animal, when M. de Carmainges had rejoined him, his pride commenced, not to diminish, but to enter into a composition,—

'Well! well!' he said, forcing a smile, 'I am in one of my unlucky days, it seems; this man, however, greatly resembled the portrait given to us by His Majesty, of the person we had to do with.'

Ernauton remained silent.

'I am speaking to you, sir,' said Sainte Maline, exasperated by this *sang-froid*, which he rightly considered as a proof of contempt, and which he was determined to put an end to by some definitive *éclat*, should it even cost him his life.

'I am speaking to you; do you not hear?'

'The person His Majesty described to us,' replied Ernauton, 'had neither dog nor stick.'

'It's true,' said Sainte Maline, 'and if I had reflected; I should have had one bruise the less on my shoulder, and two marks the less on my thigh. 'Tis good to be prudent and calm it seems to me.'

Ernauton made no reply; but rising in his stirrups and placing his hand over his eyes to obtain a better sight,—

'Yonder there,' he said, 'is the person we seek, and who is waiting for us.'

'Peste! sir,' said Sainte Maline gruffly, *jealous* at this third triumph of his companion; 'you have good sight. As for me, I can distinguish nothing but a black speck, and that with difficulty.'

Ernauton, without replying, continued to advance;

presently Sainte Maline could see and recognise the man described by the King. An evil passion seized him—he pushed his horse forward to arrive the first.

Ernauton waited; he regarded him without a threat, and with apparent inattention. This *coup d'œil* brought Sainte Maline to himself, and he restrained his horse to the usual pace.

CHAPTER XXX

SAINTE MALINE

ERNAUTON was not deceived, the man indicated was really Chicot. He was blessed with good sight and good hearing; he had seen and heard the cavaliers at some distance. He had no doubt it was him they sought, so that he waited for them.

When he became certain of this, and saw the two cavaliers directing their steps towards him, he placed his hand, without affectation, on the handle of his long sword, as if to take a noble attitude.

Ernauton and Sainte Maline regarded each other for a moment, both silent.

‘Tis with you, sir, if you wish it,’ said Ernauton to his adversary, bowing; for under these circumstances, the word adversary is more consistent than companion.

Sainte Maline was suffocated; the surprise of this courtesy almost choked him. He only replied by bowing his head; Ernauton saw that he remained silent, and spoke first.

‘Sir,’ he said to Chicot, ‘this gentleman and myself are your servants.’

Chicot bowed, with his most gracious smile.

‘Would it be indiscreet,’ continued the young man, ‘to demand your name?’

‘I am called the Ghost, sir,’ replied Chicot.

‘You expect something?’

‘Yes, sir.’

‘You will be good enough, perhaps, to tell us what you expect?’

‘I expect a letter.’

‘You comprehend our curiosity, sir, and it means nothing offensive towards you.’

Chicot again bowed, and with a smile more and more gracious.

'From what place do you expect this letter?' continued Ernauton.

'From the Louvre.'

'Sealed with what seal?'

'With the royal seal.'

Ernauton put his hand in his bosom.

'You would recognise this letter, no doubt?' he said to him.

'Yes, if I saw it.'

Ernauton drew the letter from his bosom.

'That is it,' said Chicot; 'and for greater safety, you are aware that I must give you something in exchange for it.'

'A receipt.'

'Just so.'

'Sir,' replied Ernauton, 'I was charged by the King to carry you this letter, but it is monsieur here, who is charged to deliver it.'

And he presented the letter to Sainte Maline, who took it, and placed it in the hands of Chicot.

'Thank you, gentlemen,' said the latter.

'You see,' added Ernauton, 'that we have faithfully fulfilled our mission; there is no one on the road, no one, therefore, has seen us speak to you or give you the letter.'

'Tis right, sir, I admit it, and I shall add my faith to it if necessary. It is now my turn.'

'The receipt,' said the two young men together.

'To which of the two am I to deliver it?'

'The King did not say,' exclaimed Sainte Maline, regarding his companion steadily.

'Make the receipt in duplicate, sir,' replied Ernauton, 'and give one to each of us; it is some way from hence to the Louvre, and on the road an accident may happen to myself or this gentleman.'

And saying these words, the eyes of Ernauton sparkled like a flash of lightning.

'You are a prudent man, sir,' said Chicot to Ernauton.

And he drew his tablet from his pocket, tore off two leaves, and wrote upon each of them:—

'Received from the hands of M. Renè de Sainte Maline, the letter brought by M. Ernauton de Carmainges.

'THE GHOST.'

'Adieu, sir,' said Sainte Maline, taking his receipt.

'Adieu, sir, and a good journey,' added Ernauton; 'have you anything else to transmit to the Louvre?'

'Absolutely nothing, messieurs; many thanks,' said Chicot.

Ernauton and Sainte Maline turned their horses' heads towards Paris, and Chicot departed at a pace that the best mule would have envied.

When Chicot had disappeared, Ernauton, who had scarcely gone a hundred paces, suddenly stopped his horse, and addressing Sainte Maline :—

'Now, sir, let us dismount, if you wish it.'

'And why so, sir?' said Sainte Maline with astonishment.

'Our task is accomplished, and we have to say a few words. The spot seems to me excellent for a conversation such as ours.'

'As you like, sir,' said Sainte Maline, dismounting from his horse, as his companion had already done.

When he had put his foot to the ground, Ernauton approached and said to him :—

'You know, sir, that without any provocation on my part, and without any reason on yours, in fact without any cause, you have during the journey grievously offended me. There is more; you would have put the sword in my hand at an inconvenient moment, and I refused. But at present, the moment is a good one, and I am your man.'

Sainte Maline listened to these words with a gloomy countenance and his brows knitted; but strange! Sainte Maline not being in the towering passion which had driven him beyond all bounds, Sainte Maline no longer wished to fight; reflection had brought him to his senses; he considered all the inferiority of his position.

'Sir,' he replied, after a moment's silence, 'when I insulted you, you replied by rendering me a service, I shall not therefore now hold the language to you I did a short time ago.'

Ernauton knit his brow.

'No, sir, but you still think what you spoke just now.'

'What tells you so?'

'Because all your words were dictated by hatred and envy; and that for the last two hours, since you pronounced them, this hatred and this envy cannot be extinguished in your heart.'

Sainte Maline blushed, but said not a word.

Ernauton waited a moment, and continued,—

'If the King preferred me to you, 'tis because my features are better known to him than yours; if I was not thrown into the Beivre, 'tis because I ride better than yourself; if I did not accept your challenge at the moment it pleased you to make it, it is that I had more prudence; if I was not bitten by the man's dog, it is that I had more sagacity; lastly, if I summons you at this hour to do me justice and draw the sword, it is that I have more real honour, and, take care if you hesitate, I shall add, more courage.'

Sainte Maline shuddered, and his eyes shot forth flashes; every passion that Ernauton had referred to, by turns impressed their stigma on his livid countenance; at the last word of the young man, he drew his sword like one furious.

Ernauton already held his in his hand.

'Stay, sir,' said Sainte Maline; 'withdraw the last word you have spoken, it is one too many, you will avow it, you who know me so well; since, as you said, we reside within two leagues of each other; withdraw it, you have humiliated me enough, do not dishonour me.'

'Sir,' said Ernauton, 'I never put myself into a passion; I never say what I do not mean, and consequently I shall withdraw nothing at all. I also am susceptible and fresh at court; I would not have to blush every time I meet you. A bout with the sword, if you please, sir; 'tis as much for my satisfaction as your own.'

'Oh! sir, I have fought eleven times,' said Sainte Maline, with a sombre smile; 'and of my eleven adversaries, two are dead; you know that also, I presume?'

'And I, sir, have never fought,' replied Ernauton, 'for the occasion has never presented itself; I find it at my pleasure, happening to me when I do not seek it. I wait your good pleasure, sir.'

'Stay,' said Sainte Maline, shaking his head, 'we are countrymen, we are in the service of the King, let us quarrel no more; I hold you for a brave man, I would even offer you my hand, if that were not almost impossible. What do you wish? I show myself to you as I am, ulcered to the heart; it is not my fault; I am envious, what would you have me do? Nature created me in an

evil day. M. de Chalabre, or M. de Montcrabeau, or M. de Pincornay, would not have put me in a rage, 'tis your merit that causes my chagrin; console yourself for it, since my envy can do nothing against you, and to my great regret, your merit remains to you. So that we will remain there. Eh, sir? I shall suffer too much when you mention the cause of our quarrel.'

'Our quarrel, no one will know it, sir.'

'No one.'

'No, sir, seeing that if we fight, I shall kill you, or be killed. I am not one of those who think but little of life; on the contrary, I think a great deal of it. I am twenty-three years of age, possess a good name; I am not precisely poor, I hope in myself and in the future; and be assured, I shall defend myself like a lion.'

'Well! I, on the contrary, sir, am already thirty, and am sufficiently disgusted with life, for I believe neither in the future, nor in myself; so disgusted with life, and incredulous of the future am I, I would rather not fight with you.'

'In that case you will make me an apology, then?' said Ernauton.

'No, I have done enough, and said enough. If you are not content, so much the better, for in that case you will cease to be my superior.'

'I shall remind you, sir, that we do not thus terminate a quarrel without exposing ourselves to be laughed at, when we are both Gascons.'

'That is exactly what I expect,' said Sainte Maline.

'You expect?'

'A laugh. Oh! how I shall enjoy that moment!'

'You refuse the combat, then?'

'I do not wish to fight with you, be it understood.'

'After having insulted me?'

'I admit it.'

'But, sir, suppose my patience leaves me, and I charge you with my sword.'

Sainte Maline contracted his hands convulsively.

'Well! so much the better: I shall throw away my sword.'

'Take care, sir; for, in that event, I shall not strike you with the point.'

'Right, for I shall then have reason to hate you, and I shall hate you mortally; and some day, a day of

weakness on your part, I shall catch you, as you have just done with me, and I shall take your life—from despair.'

Ernauton replaced his sword in its sheath.

'You are a strange man,' he said, 'and I pity you from the bottom of my heart.'

'You pity me?'

'Yes, for you must suffer horribly.'

'Horribly.'

'You can never love?'

'Never.'

'But you have passions, at any rate?'

'Only one.'

'Jealousy, you have told me.'

'Yes, which proves that I have them all to an indescribable degree of shame and misfortune. I adore a woman the moment she loves another than myself. I love gold when another hand touches it. I am always proud from comparison. I drink to warm me into passion, that is to say, to render it sharp when it is only chronic; that is, to force it to burst, and burn like a thunderbolt. Ah! yes, yes, you said it, Monsieur de Carmainges, I am unfortunate.'

'You have never endeavoured to become good?' demanded Ernauton.

'I have not succeeded.'

'What do you hope for? What do you think of doing then?'

'What does the poisonous plant do? It has flowers like another, and certain individuals know how to turn it to a use. What does the bear, and the bird of prey? they bite; but certain professors know how to train them for the chase. This is what I am, and what I shall be, probably, in the hands of M. d'Epernon and M. de Loignac, until the day when they will say: "This plant is noxious, root it up; this brute is mad, kill him."'

Ernauton had calmed himself by degrees. Sainte Maline was no longer for him an object of anger, but of study; he felt almost pity for this man, whom circumstances had driven to make him such singular avowals.

'A great fortune, and you might acquire it, having great qualities, would cure you,' he said; 'develop yourself in the way of your instincts, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, and you will succeed in the ranks or in intrigue; and then, being enabled to govern, you will hate less.'

'However high I raise myself, however deeply I take root, there will always be above me superior fortunes that will wound me; below me, sardonic laughter that will rend my ears.'

'I pity you,' repeated Ernauton.

And here it ended.

Ernauton went to his horse, which he had fastened to a tree, and, unloosing him, placed himself in the saddle.

Sainte Maline had not quitted the bridle of his. They both took the road to Paris, the one silent and sombre from what he had heard, the other from what he had said.

Suddenly Ernauton extended his hand to Sainte Maline.

'Would you wish me to attempt to cure you?' he said to him; 'come.'

'Not a word more, sir,' said Sainte Maline; 'no, no, do not attempt that, you will fail. Hate me, on the contrary, and it will be the means of my admiring you.'

'Once more, I pity you, sir,' said Ernauton.

In about an hour the two cavaliers re-entered the Louvre, and directed their steps towards the lodging of the forty-five.

The King was gone out, and would not return until the evening.

CHAPTER XXXI

HOW M. DE LOIGNAC MADE A CHARGE TO THE FORTY-FIVE

EACH of the young men placed himself at the window of his little lodge, to watch for the return of the King. They had each established themselves there with different ideas.

Sainte Maline in his hatred, in his shame, in his ambition; his brow knitted, his heart on fire.

Ernauton, already forgetful of all that had passed, and preoccupied with a single object, namely, who could be that woman, he had introduced into Paris under the costume of a page, and whom he had again encountered in a rich litter.

Here was ample matter of reflection for a heart more disposed to amorous adventures, than the calculations of ambition.

Ernauton, then, buried himself by degrees in his reflections, and this so deeply that it was only on raising his head he perceived that Sainte Maline was no longer there.

A thought crossed his mind: less preoccupied than himself, Sainte Maline had watched the return of the King; the King had returned, and Sainte Maline was with him.

He rose hastily, crossed the gallery, and arrived at the King's door, at the very moment Sainte Maline was leaving it.

'Stay,' said he, radiant, to Ernauton, 'see what the King has given me!' And he showed a chain of gold.

'Accept my compliments, sir,' said Ernauton, without betraying the least emotion.

And in his turn he entered the chamber of the King.

Sainte Maline expected some manifestation of jealousy on the part of Carmainges; he remained, therefore, stupefied at this calmness, waiting the coming out of Ernauton.

The latter remained about ten minutes with the King. These ten minutes were ages for Sainte Maline.

At length he came out. Sainte Maline was at the same place; with one glance he enveloped his companion, his heart then dilated; Ernauton brought out nothing, at least nothing visible.

'And you,' demanded Sainte Maline, pursuing his thoughts, 'what has the King given you, sir?'

'His hand to kiss,' replied Ernauton, smiling.

Sainte Maline grasped his chain between his hands so nervously that he broke a link.

They both wended their way in silence towards the lodging.

At the moment they entered the hall, the trumpet sounded. At this appeal each of the forty-five left their cells, like bees from their hives.

They demanded of one another what had happened afresh, and profiting, by the moment of the general reunion, to admire the change that had taken place in the person and exterior of their companions, which in most cases was more luxurious than tasteful.

Besides, they had what d'Epéron looked for, as skilful a politician as he was a bad soldier; some had youth, others strength, others again experience, and this rectified, amongst all, at least one imperfection.

Altogether they resembled a corps of officers in a town

dress, the military cut (with very few exceptions) being that which they had an ambition for.

Thus, long swords, jingling spurs, moustaches with killing twists, boots, and gloves of doeskin or leather, the whole well gilt, pomaded, and ribboned, to make an appearance, as they said; this was the instinctive exterior adopted by the greatest number.

The most discreet appeared in sombre colours, the economical in solid cloth, the gamesome in red and white satin and lace.

Perducas de Pincornay had found, at some Jew's, a gilt steel chain as large as a dog chain.

Pertinax de Montcrabeau was nothing but favours and embroidery. He had purchased his costume of a tradesman in the Rue des Haudriettes, who had received a gentleman wounded by robbers; the gentleman had sent for other garments from his own house, and recognising the hospitality received, he had left to the merchant his coat, somewhat tarnished with dirt and blood; but the merchant had had the stains taken out, and the coat remained very presentable, with the exception of two holes, the traces of two stabs with the poniard; but Pertinax had had these two places embroidered with gold, which changed a defect into an ornament.

Eustache de Miradoux did not shine; he had to rig out Lardille, Militor, and the two children. Lardille had chosen a costume as rich as the sumptuary laws permitted women to wear at this period; Militor was covered with velvet and damask, had bedecked himself with a silver chain, a hat and feathers, and embroidered stockings; so that there only remained to the poor Eustache a sum just sufficient to keep him out of rags.

M. de Chalabre had retained his iron-gray doublet, which a tailor had cleaned and lined afresh; a few bands of velvet, skilfully sewed on here and there, gave an additional relief to the evergreen garment. M. de Chalabre pretended that he wished for nothing better than to change his doublet; but that, despite the most minute search, he had found it impossible to alight upon a habit better made or more advantageous.

In addition, he had been at the expense of a pair of breeches, of a deep scarlet; boots, cloak, and hat, the whole in harmony to the view, as is generally the case in the dress of a miser. As to his arms, they were irreproachable.

An old man of war, he had found an excellent Spanish sword, a well-made dagger, and a gorget complete.

These gentlemen, then, were reciprocally admiring each other, when M. de Loignac entered, his brow clouded; he made them form the circle, and placed himself in the middle of this circle, with a countenance which announced nothing of the agreeable.

It is hardly necessary to observe that every eye was fixed upon the chief.

'Messieurs,' he said, 'are you all here?'

'All,' replied forty-five voices, with a unity which promised much for their future manœuvres.

'Messieurs,' continued Loignac, 'you have been sent for here to serve as a private guard to the King; 'tis an honourable title, but which demands much.'

Loignac made a pause, which was filled up by a soft murmur of satisfaction.

'Many of you, however, appear to me not to have perfectly comprehended your duties; I will recall them to you.'

They all opened their ears; it was evident they were anxious to know their duties, if not eager to fulfil them.

'You must not imagine, messieurs, that the King enrolls and pays you to act like coxcombs, and to distribute here and there, at your caprice, a scratch or a bite; discipline is urgent, although it remains secret, and you are an assembly of gentlemen, who ought to be the most obedient and the most devoted in the kingdom.'

The assembly breathed not; it was easily perceivable, in fact, from the solemnity of the debut, that the *dénouement* would be serious.

'From to-day you will live in the intimacy of the Louvre, that is, in the very laboratory of the government. If you do not assist in all its deliberations, you will be frequently chosen to execute its orders; you are, then, in the position of those officers who carry in themselves not only the responsibility of a secret, but also the influence of the executive power.'

A second murmur of satisfaction ran through the ranks of the Gascons; heads were held up, as if pride had raised these men several inches in height.

'Suppose now,' continued Loignac, 'that one of these officers, upon whom at times reposes the safety of the state, or the tranquillity of the crown, suppose, I say, that

an officer betrays the secret of the council, or that a soldier, charged with an order, neglects to execute it, it is death, you know that ?'

'Undoubtedly,' replied several voices.

'Well ! messieurs,' pursued Loignac, with a terrible accent, 'here, to-day, they have betrayed the council of the King, and probably rendered impossible a measure which His Majesty wished to take.'

Terror began to take the place of pride and admiration, the forty-five looked at each other with distrust and inquietude.

'Two of you, messieurs, have been surprised in open day, chaffing like two old women, and throwing to the winds words so serious, that each of them now may strike a man and kill him.'

Sainte Maline immediately advanced towards M. de Loignac and said to him :—

'Sir, I believe I have the honour of speaking to you in the name of my comrades; it is important that you no longer allow suspicion to rest upon all the servants of the King; speak at once, if you please, that we may know how to act, and that the good may not be confounded with the bad.'

'That is not difficult,' said Loignac.

The attention was redoubled.

'The King has received advice to-day, that one of his enemies, precisely one of those whom you are called upon to combat against, arrived at Paris to beard or conspire against him.

'The name of this enemy has been pronounced secretly, but was heard by a sentinel, that is, by a man who ought to be looked upon as a wall, and, consequently, deaf, dumb, and unshaken; and yet this man, in the open street, repeated the name of this enemy of the King, with fanfarronades and noise which attracted the attention of the passers by, and raised a sort of emotion; I know it myself, as I followed the same road as this man, and heard the whole with my own ears. I placed my hand upon his shoulder, to prevent his continuing, for, at the rate he was proceeding, he would, in a few words more, have compromised so many sacred interests, that I should have been compelled to poniard him on the spot, if, at my first warning, he had not remained silent.'

At this moment Pertinax de Montcrabeau and Perducas

de Pincornay were observed to turn pale, and fell back, nearly fainting, one against the other.

Montcrabeau, still unsteady, essayed to stammer out a few excuses.

The moment the two culpables thus denounced themselves, all eyes were fixed upon them.

'Nothing can justify you, sir,' said Loignac to Montcrabeau; 'if you were drunk, you ought to be punished for having drunk; if you were only boasting and proud, you ought still to be punished.'

There was a terrible silence. M. de Loignac had, we may remember, on commencing, announced a severity which promised painful results.

'In consequence,' continued Loignac, 'M. de Montcrabeau, and you also, M. de Pincornay, will be punished.'

'Pardon, sir,' replied Pertinax; 'but we arrive from a province; we are new at court, and we are ignorant of the art of living amidst politics.'

'You must not accept the honour of being in the service of His Majesty, without weighing the responsibility of the service.'

'For the future we will be as dumb as the tomb. This we swear.'

'All this is very good, messieurs; but will you to-morrow repair the fault you have committed to-day?'

'We will try.'

'Impossible, I tell you, impossible!'

'Then, for this once, pardon us, sir.'

'You live,' continued Loignac, without answering directly the prayer of the two culpables, 'in an apparent licence, which I will repress by a strict discipline. Understand this well, messieurs! Those who may find their position hard, will quit it. I shall not be embarrassed for volunteers to replace them.'

No one replied; but many a forehead was wrinkled.

'Consequently, messieurs,' resumed Loignac, 'it is right you should be forewarned of this; justice will be administered amongst us secretly, expeditiously; without writing, without process, traitors will be punished with death, and that on the instant. There are all sorts of precedents for this, and no one will have anything to say against it. Suppose, for example, that M. de Montcrabeau and M. de Pincornay, instead of conversing amicably, in the street, of things they ought to forget,

had had a dispute about things which they would have done right to remember; well, might not this dispute bring on a duel between M. de Pincornay and M. de Montcrabeau? In a duel it sometimes happens that we cleave our adversary and are run through at the very same moment; the morning after the dispute, the two messieurs are found dead at the Pre-aux-Clercs, like MM. de Quelus, Schomberg, and de Maugiron, dead at the Tournelles; the affair is talked of as a duel should be, and there's an end of it.

'I will have killed, then, messieurs; you will understand this, do you not? I will have killed in a duel, or otherwise, whoever shall betray the secrets of the King.'

Montcrabeau fainted completely, and leaned upon his companion, whose paleness became more and more livid, and whose teeth had closed like a vice.

'For less serious faults,' resumed Loignac, 'I shall have milder punishments; confinement, for example, and I shall make use of it when it will more severely punish the guilty, than deprive the King.'

'To-day I pardon the life of M. de Montcrabeau who has spoken, and M. de Pincornay who has listened; I pardon them, I say, because they have been mistaken and were ignorant; I do not punish them with prison, because I might have occasion for their services to-night or to-morrow morning. I reserve for them, therefore, the third punishment; I mean to employ against delinquents a fine.'

At the word fine, the countenance of M. de Chalabre lengthened like the muzzle of a weasel.

'You have received a thousand livres, messieurs, you will return a hundred, and this money will be employed by me in recompensing those who, according to their merits, I may not have to reproach.'

'A hundred livres,' replied de Pincornay, 'why, Cap de Bious! I have no longer these hundred livres; I have employed them in equipping myself.'

'You will sell your chain,' said Loignac.

'I would willingly abandon it to the service of the King,' said Pincornay.

'No, sir; the King does not purchase the effects of his subjects to pay their fines; sell yourself, and pay yourself. I have one word to add,' said Loignac.

'I have observed many germs of irritation amongst

several members of this company; every time a difference should arise, I wish them to summon me, and I alone will assume the right of judging of the gravity of the difference, and of ordering the combat, if I consider the combat to be necessary. The duel is a frequent mode of dying, in our days 'tis the fashion, and I have no ambition that, to follow the fashion, my company should be incessantly stripped and insufficient. The first combat, the first challenge, that shall take place without my knowledge, shall be punished with a rigorous confinement, a heavy fine, or even with a punishment still more severe, if the case should cause a great damage to the service.

'Let those who can apply these regulations apply them. Go, messieurs.'

'By the way, fifteen of you will place yourselves to-night at the foot of the staircase of His Majesty, when he receives, and, on the first sign, will scatter yourselves, if necessary, in the antechambers. Fifteen will remain outside, without any ostensible mission, mixing in the suite of those who may arrive at the Louvre; the other fifteen, lastly, will remain at the lodging.'

'Sir,' said Sainte Maline, approaching, 'permit me, not to give advice, God forbid ! but to ask for an explanation; every good troop needs to be well commanded; how shall we act in unison if we have not a chief ?'

'And what am I, then ?' said Loignac.

'Sir, you are our general.'

'Not I, sir, you are mistaken, but M. d'Epéronn.'

'You are our brigadier, then; in that case it is not enough, sir, and we must have an officer to each squadron of fifteen men.'

'Tis just,' replied Loignac, 'and I cannot divide myself into three parts daily, and yet I should not wish to have amongst you other superiority than that of merit.'

'Oh ! as to that, sir, should you deny it, it will appear of itself, and by the work you will know the difference, if in the *ensemble* it is not so.'

'I shall institute, then, officers for the day,' said Loignac, after reflecting for a moment on the words of Sainte Maline; 'with the password I shall give the name of the chief; by these means each in his turn will learn to obey and command; but as yet I do not know the capacities of any one; these capacities must be developed to fit upon my choice. I shall look about and judge.'

Sainte Maline bowed, and returned to the ranks.

'But you understand,' continued Loignac, 'I have divided you into squadrons of fifteen; you know your numbers; the first to the staircase, the second in the court, the third in the lodging; the latter in half-dress, and the sword by the bedside, that is, ready to march at the first signal. Now go, messieurs.'

'Monsieur de Montcrabeau and M. de Pincornay, to-morrow the payment of your fine; I am treasurer; go.'

They all left but Ernauton de Carmainges, who alone remained.

'You desire something, sir?' demanded Loignac.

'Yes, sir,' said Ernauton, bowing; 'it appears to me you have forgotten to state what we shall have to do. To be in the service of the King is a glorious sound, no doubt, but I should much like to know to what this service leads.'

'This, sir,' replied Loignac, 'constitutes a delicate question, and which I cannot categorically answer.'

'May I be bold enough to ask why, sir?'

These questions were addressed to M. de Loignac with such an exquisite politeness, that, contrary to his habit, M. de Loignac vainly searched for a severe reply.

'Because I myself am often ignorant in the morning of what I may have to do before night.'

'Sir,' said Carmainges, 'you are placed so high in regard to us, that we ought to know many things of which we are ignorant.'

'Do as I have done, Monsieur de Carmainges; learn things without being told them; I do not hinder you.'

'I appeal to your observations, sir,' said Ernauton, 'because, having arrived at court without friendships or hatreds, and being guided by no individual passion, I may, without being of more value, at the same time be of more use than another.'

'You have neither friendships nor hatreds?'

'No, sir.'

'You love the King, however? at least so I suppose.'

'I ought to, and I do, Monsieur de Loignac, as servant, subject, and as a gentleman.'

'Well! 'tis one of the cardinal points upon which you ought to guide yourself; if you are a skilful man, it ought to serve you to discover who is opposed to him.'

'Very well, sir,' replied Ernauton, bowing, 'and I am

decided. There remains one point, however, which greatly disturbs me.'

'Which, sir?'

'Passive obedience.'

'Tis the first condition.'

'I perfectly understood so, sir; passive obedience is sometimes difficult for men who are somewhat delicate about their honour.'

'That does not regard me, Monsieur de Carmaingès,' replied Loignac.

'And yet, sir, when an order displeases you?'

'I read the signature of M. d'Epernon, and that consoles me.'

'And M. d'Epernon?'

'M. d'Epernon reads the signature of His Majesty, and consoles himself like me.'

'You are right, sir,' said Ernauton, 'and I am your humble servant.'

Ernauton made a step, as if retiring; Loignac retained him.

'You have, however, awakened in me certain ideas,' he said, 'and I will tell you things I would not say to others, because those others have neither the courage nor the consistency to speak to me as you have done.'

Ernauton bowed.

'Sir,' said Loignac, approaching the young man, 'perhaps to-night some one of importance will arrive. Do not lose sight of him, and follow him everywhere he goes, on leaving the Louvre.'

'Sir, allow me to tell it you, but it seems to me this is to be a spy.'

'To spy! do you think so?' said Loignac coldly; 'it's possible; but stay.'

He drew from his doublet a paper, which he handed to Carmaingès; the latter unfolded it and read:—

"'Have M. de Mayenne followed to-night, if by chance he dares to present himself at the Louvre.'"

'Signed?' inquired Loignac.

'"Signed by d'Epernon,"' read Carmaingès.

'Well, sir?'

'Tis right,' replied Ernauton, bowing low, 'I will follow M. de Mayenne.'

And he retired.

CHAPTER XXXII

MESSIEURS THE BOURGEOIS OF PARIS

M. DE MAYENNE, about whom the Louvre was so much occupied, but who was so little aware of it, departed from the Hôtel de Guise, by a back door; and booted and on his horse, as though just arrived from a journey, he repaired to the Louvre with three gentlemen.

M. d'Epéron, apprised of his arrival, sent to announce his visit to the King.

M. de Loignac, also informed of it, had sent a second notice to the forty-five; fifteen placed themselves, therefore, as had been agreed upon, in the antechambers, fifteen in the court, and fourteen in the lodging.

We say fourteen, because Ernauton, having, as we are aware, received a private mission, was not amongst his companions.

But as the suite of M. de Mayenne was not of a nature to inspire any fears, the second company received authority to re-enter their barrack.

M. de Mayenne, introduced to His Majesty, made him respectfully a visit which the King affectionately received.

'Well, my cousin,' demanded the King of him, 'you are come then to visit Paris?'

'Yes, sire,' said Mayenne, 'I thought it my duty to come, in the name of my brothers and myself, to remind your Majesty that you have no subjects more faithful than ourselves.'

'By the mordieu!' said Henry, 'the thing is so well known, that, apart the pleasure you give me by the visit, you might, in truth, have spared yourself this little journey. There must certainly be some other cause.'

'Sire, I feared that your consideration for the house of Guise might be affected by the strange reports which our enemies have circulated for some time past.'

'What reports?' said the King, with that good nature which rendered him so dangerous to the most intimate.

'How!' exclaimed Mayenne, a little disconcerted, 'your Majesty has heard nothing that is unfavourable to us?'

'Cousin,' said the King, 'understand, once for all, that I do not permit them here to say any harm of the

MM. Guise; and, as they know this better than you appear to know it, they do not mention them, duke.'

'In that case, sire,' said Mayenne, 'I shall not regret having come, since I have the pleasure of seeing my King, and of finding him in such a disposition; but I will confess that my precipitation has been useless.'

'Oh! duke, Paris is a good city, from whence there is always some service to be obtained,' said the King.

'Yes, sire, but we have our affairs at Soissons.'

'Which, duke?'

'Those of your Majesty, sire.'

'It's true, it's true, Mayenne, continue to pursue them as you have commenced. I know how to appreciate and recompense, as I ought, the conduct of my servants.'

The duke retired smiling.

The King re-entered his chamber, rubbing his hands.

Loignac made a sign to Ernauton, who said a word to his valet, and prepared to follow the four cavaliers.

The valet ran to the stables, and Ernauton followed on foot.

There was no danger of losing M. de Mayenne; the indiscretion of Perducas de Pincornay had made known the arrival at Paris of a prince of the house of Guise. At this news, the good leaguers had commenced issuing from their houses, and following his traces.

Mayenne was not difficult to recognise, from his wide shoulders, his round figure, and the cut of his beard.

They had followed him, therefore, to the gates of the Louvre, and there the same companions waited to rejoin him at his exit, and accompany him to the door of the hotel.

In vain did Mayneville disperse the most zealous, by saying to them:—

'Not so much fire, my friends, not so much fire; you will compromise us.'

The duke had an escort of not less than two or three hundred men, when he arrived at the Hôtel Saint Denis, where he had fixed his residence.

This was a great assistance to Ernauton in following the duke without being remarked.

At the moment the duke entered, and was turning round to bow, in one of the gentlemen who saluted at the same time as himself he thought he recognised the cavalier who accompanied the page, or whom the page accompanied.

whom he had contrived to introduce into Paris by the Saint Antoine gate, and who had shown so strange a curiosity at the Place de Grève as to the execution of Salcède.

Almost at the same moment, and just as Mayenne disappeared, a litter cut through the crowd. Mayneville went to meet it, one of the curtains was drawn aside, and, thanks to a ray of moonlight, Ernauton fancied he recognised not only his page, but the lady of the Saint Antoine gate.

Mayneville and the lady exchanged a few words, the litter disappeared under the porch of the hotel; Mayneville followed the litter, and the door closed.

A moment afterwards, Mayneville appeared on the balcony, thanked the Parisians, in the name of the duke; and as it was getting late, he invited them to seek their homes, in order that malevolence might extract no harm from their assembling.

Every one dispersed upon this invitation, with the exception of ten men, who had entered in the suite of the duke.

Ernauton took his departure, with the others, or rather, whilst the others dispersed, he pretended to follow their example.

The ten chosen ones, who had remained, to the exclusion of the others, were the deputies of the league, sent to M. de Mayenne to thank him for coming; but at the same time to entreat him to decide his brother to make his appearance amongst them.

In fact, the worthy bourgeois, whom we have already had a glimpse of, these worthy bourgeois who did not want for imagination, had combined in their preparatory reunions, a heap of plans which only waited for the sanction and support of a chief upon whom they could rely.

Bussy Leclerc came to announce that he had exercised three convents in the use of weapons, and had enrolled five hundred bourgeois, that is to say, placed at disposal an effective of one thousand men.

Lachapelle Marteau had exercised the magistrates, clerks, and all the people of the palace. He could offer at the same time council and execution; the council represented by two hundred black robes, and execution by two hundred hoquetons or guards.

Brigard had the merchants of the Rue des Lombards; the pillars of the market-place and of the Rue Saint Denis.

Crucè shared in the procureurs with Lachapelle Marteau, and in addition disposed of the university of Paris.

Debas offered all the sailors and people of the port, a dangerous sort, forming a contingency of five hundred men.

Louchard disposed of five hundred jockeys and horse dealers, mad Catholics.

A pewterer, named Pollard, and a pork-shop keeper, named Gilbert, presented fifteen hundred butchers and pork-sellers of the city and faubourgs.

Maître Nicholas Poulain, Chicot's friend, offered everything and everybody.

When the duke, safely immured in a secure apartment, had listened to these revelations and these offers,—

'I admire the strength of the league,' he said; 'but the object which it comes to propose to me, I do not see.'

Maître Lachapelle Marteau immediately prepared himself for a discourse on three points; he was very prolix, which was well known; Mayenne shuddered.

'Do it quickly,' he said.

Bussy Leclerc cut short the speech of Marteau.

'Here it is,' he said; 'we are anxious for a change; we are the strongest, and therefore we will have this change; this is short, clear, and precise.'

'But,' demanded Mayenne, 'how will you act to obtain this change?'

'It seems to me,' said Bussy Leclerc, with that frankness of speech which, in a man of low extraction like him, might pass for audacity, 'it appears to me, that the idea of the union, springing from our chiefs, 'tis for our chiefs, and not for us, to indicate the means.'

'Messieurs,' replied Mayenne, 'you are perfectly right; the means ought to be indicated by those who have the honour of being your chiefs; but this is the time to repeat to you that the general ought to be the judge of the moment for engaging in combat; and that having seen his troops ranged, armed, and animated, he does not give the signal to charge until he sees the moment has arrived.'

'But in fact, monseigneur,' replied Crucè, 'the league is pressing; we have already had the honour of telling you so.'

'In a hurry for what, Monsieur Crucè,' demanded Mayenne.

'Why, to arrive.'

'At what?'

'At our object; we have also a plan of our own.'

'In that case it is different,' said Mayenne; 'if you have your plan, I have nothing more to say.'

'Yes, monseigneur; but we may reckon on your support?'

'Without doubt, if this plan suits my brother and myself.'

'Tis probable, monseigneur, that it will be agreeable to you.'

'Let us know the plan, then.'

The leaguers regarded each other; two or three made a sign to Lachapelle Marteau to speak.

Lachapelle Marteau advanced, and appeared to solicit the duke for permission to explain himself.

'Speak,' said the duke.

'Here it is, monseigneur,' said Marteau. 'It occurred to us, Leclerc, Crucè, and myself; we have deeply meditated, and it is probable that its result is certain.'

'To the fact, Monsieur Marteau; to the fact.'

'There are several points in the city which unite all the strength of the city amongst them; the great and the little Chapelet, the palace of the Temple, the Hôtel de Ville, the arsenal, and the Louvre.'

'It's true,' said the duke.

'All these points are defended by resident garrisons; but little difficult to force, because they cannot expect an attack.'

'I also admit this,' said the duke.

'The city, however, is further defended; first by the knight of the watch with his archers, who perambulate the places most in danger, being the real defence of Paris.'

'This is what we have imagined.'

'Seize at his quarters the knight of the watch, who lodges at the Coutre Sainte Catherine.'

'The attack might be made without attracting attention, the spot being deserted and lonely.'

Mayenne shook his head.

'Deserted and lonely as it is,' he said, 'they do not break in a strong door, nor fire a score of arquebuses, without making some little disturbance.'

'We have provided against this objection, monseigneur,' said Marteau; 'one of the archers of the knight of the

watch is ours. In the middle of the night, we shall knock at the door, two or three only; the archer will open, he will go to the chevalier, and inform him that His Majesty wishes to speak to him. There will be nothing strange in this; once a month, for example, the King sends to this officer for his reports and expeditions. The door being thus opened, we shall send in a dozen of the sailors, who lodge in the quarter Saint Paul, and who will expedite the knight of the watch.'

'Cut his throat, you mean?'

'Yes, monseigneur. Here, then, are the first means of defence intercepted. It is true that other magistrates, other functionaries, might be apprised by the trembling or politic bourgeois; there is M. the president, there is M. d'Or, there is M. de Chiverny, M. the procureur Laguesle; well! we shall force their doors at the same hours; Saint Bartholomew has taught us how to accomplish this, and we shall treat them, as we shall have treated M. the chevalier of the watch.'

'Oh! oh!' said the duke, who thought the matter serious.

'This will be an excellent opportunity, monseigneur, to run over to the politicians, all designated in our quarters, and make a finish with the religious heretics and the political heretics.'

'All this is very well, messieurs,' said Mayenne; 'but you have not explained to me whether you will also take, at the same moment, the Louvre, a really strong château, where guards and gentlemen are incessantly on the watch. The King, timid as he is, will not permit his throat to be cut like the chevalier of the watch; he will put a sword in his hand, and, think well of this, he is the King; his presence will have much effect on the bourgeois, and you will be beaten.'

'We have chosen four thousand for this expedition of the Louvre, monseigneur; and four thousand men are not so deeply in love with the Valois, that his presence will produce upon them the effect you anticipate.'

'You think that this will be sufficient?'

'No doubt, we shall be ten to one,' said Bussy Leclerc.

'And the Swiss? there are four thousand of them, messieurs.'

'Yes, but they are at Laguy, and Laguy is eight leagues from Paris; therefore admitting that the

King might be enabled to apprise them, two hours for the messengers to reach there on horseback, eight hours for the Swiss to make the journey on foot, this will make ten hours, and they will arrive just in time to be stopped at the barriers, for in ten hours we shall be masters of the whole city.'

'Well! be it so, I admit all this; the chevalier of the watch is slaughtered, the politicians are destroyed, the authorities of the city have disappeared, every obstacle in fact is removed; you have, of course, arranged what you will then do?'

'We will make a government of honest men as we are,' said Brigard; 'and provided we succeed in our little trade, that we have bread secured for our wives and children, we desire nothing more. A little ambition, perhaps, might induce a few of us to be dixainiers, or aldermen, or commandants of a company of militia. Well! Monseigneur the Duke, we shall be so, but that's all; you see we are not very exacting.'

'Monsieur Brigard, you speak nobly,' said the duke; 'yes, you are honest, I know it well, and you will not suffer in your ranks any mixture.'

'Oh! no, no!' exclaimed several voices, 'no lees with good wine.'

'Capital!' said the duke, 'this is speaking. And now let us see, Monsieur the lieutenant of the provost, are there many idlers and vagabonds in the Ile de France?'

Nicholas Poulain, who had not once put himself forward, advanced despite himself,—

'Yes, certainly, monseigneur,' he said, 'there are but too many of them.'

'Can you give us nearly the amount of this population?'

'Yes, nearly.'

'Estimate them, Maître Poulain.'

Poulain began to reckon on his fingers,—

'Thieves: three to four thousand.'

'Idlers and beggars: two thousand to two thousand five hundred.'

'Thieves occasionally: one thousand five hundred to two thousand.'

'Assassins: four hundred to five hundred.'

'Good! at a low estimate here are six thousand to six thousand five hundred fellows of the sack and cord; to what religion do these gentry belong?'

'Please you, monseigneur ?' said Poulain.

'I ask if they are Catholics or Huguenots ?'

Poulain set up a laugh.

'They are of all religions, monseigneur,' he said, 'or rather of one alone; their god is gold, and blood is their prophet.'

'Good ! so much for the religious religion, if we may say so. And now for the political religion, what shall we say about this ? Are they for the Valois, leaguers, political zealots, or Navarrais ?'

'They are bandits and pillagers.'

'Monseigneur, do not suppose,' said Crucè, 'that we shall ever accept these men as allies.'

'No, certainly, I do not suppose so, Monsieur Crucè, and 'tis precisely this that perplexes me.'

'And why does this perplex you, monseigneur ?' asked some members of the deputation with surprise.

'Ah ! understand, messieurs, that 'tis just because these men, who have no religion, no opinion, and who, in consequence, do not fraternise with you, seeing that there are no longer in Paris magistrates, no public strength, no royalty, no more in fact of that which before restrained them, will prepare to pillage your shops whilst you are fighting, and your houses whilst you occupy the Louvre; at one time they will join the Swiss against you, at another they will join with you against the Swiss, so that they will be always the strongest.'

'The devil !' said the deputies, staring at one another.

'I think it is quite enough to be thought of ; eh, messieurs ?' said the duke. 'As to myself, I am occupied much about it, and I shall find the means of obviating this inconvenience, for your interest is before ours ; 'tis the device of my brother, and myself.'

The deputies uttered a murmur of approbation.

'And now, messieurs, permit a man who has made twenty-four leagues on horseback in the night and day, to seek his pillow for a few hours; there is no danger in the house, at present at least, whereas if you act, there will be; this is not your opinion, perhaps ?'

'Oh ! yes, Monseigneur the Duke,' said Brigard.

'Very well.'

'With all humility we shall take leave of you then, monseigneur,' continued Brigard; 'and when would you fix for another reunion ?'

'It shall be as soon as possible, messieurs; be tranquil,' said Mayenne; 'to-morrow, perhaps; the day after, at the latest.'

And taking his leave, he left them, quite astonished at this foresight, which had discovered a danger of which they had not so much as dreamt.

But scarcely had he disappeared, when a door, concealed in the tapestry, opened, and a woman rushed into the hall.

'The duchess!' exclaimed the deputies.

'Yes, messieurs,' she cried, 'and who comes to get you out of your embarrassment too.'

The deputies, who knew her resolution, but who, at the same time, feared her enthusiasm, eagerly pressed round her.

'Messieurs,' continued the duchess, smiling, 'what the Hebrews could not accomplish, Judith alone has done. Hope, for I also have my plan.'

And presenting to the leaguers two white hands, which the most gallant kissed, she left by the door which had already given passage to Mayenne.

'Tu Dieu!' exclaimed Bussy Leclerc, licking his moustaches, and following the duchess, 'I decidedly think this is the *man* of the family.'

'Ouf!' murmured Nicholas Poulain, wiping off the sweat which stood on his forehead at the sight, 'Madame de Montpensier, I would willingly be out of all this.'

CHAPTER XXXIII

BROTHER BORROMEE

It was nearly ten o'clock at night; the deputies had returned very contrite, and at every corner of the street which approached nearest their houses, they quitted each other, after exchanging civilities.

Nicholas Poulain, who resided at the greatest distance, wended his way the last and alone, deeply reflecting as to the perplexing situation which had caused him to pronounce the exclamation which ends the last paragraph of the last chapter.

In fact, the day had been for every one, and particularly for him, fertile in events.

He was returning home, therefore, trembling at what he had heard, and saying to himself, that if the Ghost had judged it à propos to drive him to a denunciation of the plot of Vincennes, Robert Briquet would never pardon him for not having revealed the plan of manœuvres so naïvely developed by Lachapelle Marteau to M. de Mayenne.

In the deepest of his reflections, and in the middle of the Rue de la Pierre au Real, a sort of trench about four feet wide, which led to the Rue Neuve Saint Mery, Nicholas Poulain perceived, running in an opposite direction to that in which he was walking, a Jacobin's robe tucked up to the knee.

He was bound to draw aside, for two Christians could not pass the street except sideways.

Nicholas Poulain hoped that the humility of the monk would cede the pavement to him a man of the sword. But it was not so; the monk ran like a startled deer; he ran so swiftly, that he would have knocked down a wall, and Nicholas Poulain, while cursing, drew aside that he might not be upset.

But then commenced for them in this tunnel, lined with houses, that exciting evolution which takes place between two men undecided, who would both pass, who do not like to be embarrassed, and who always find themselves brought back into the arms of each other.

Poulain swore; and the man of the robe, less patient than the man of the sword, seized him by the middle of his body to pin him against the wall.

In this conflict, and as they were on the point of wrestling, they recognised each other.

'Brother Borromée!' exclaimed Poulain.

'Maître Nicholas Poulain!' exclaimed the monk.

'How are you?' continued Poulain, with that admirable good nature and that unalterable gentleness of the Parisian bourgeois.

'Very ill!' replied the monk, much more difficult to calm than the layman; 'for you have delayed me, and I was very much pressed.'

'What a devil of a man you are!' replied Poulain; 'always as warlike as a Roman! But where the devil are you running to at this hour, and in this haste? Is the priory on fire?'

'No; but I have been to the duchess to speak to Mayneville.'

'With what duchess?'

'There is but one, I believe, at whose house one could speak with Mayneville,' said Borromée, who at first thought he might reply categorically to the lieutenant of the provost, because the lieutenant might have him followed, but who, nevertheless, would not be too communicative to the curious.

'Then what had you to do at the house of Madame de Montpensier?' said Nicholas Poulain.

'Eh! mon Dieu! 'tis quite simple,' said Borromée, seeking for a specious reply; 'our reverend prior has been solicited by Madame the Duchess to become her director; he had accepted, but a scruple of conscience has overtaken him, and he refuses. The interview is fixed for to-morrow; I must, therefore, on the part of Dom Modeste Gorenflot, say to the duchess, that she must not reckon upon him.'

'Very well; but you do not appear to me to be going towards the Hôtel de Guise, my very dear brother; I shall even say more, which is, that you have completely turned your back upon it.'

'It's true,' replied brother Borromée, 'since I am coming from it.'

'But where are you going, then?'

'They told me, at the hotel, that Madame the Duchess was gone to pay a visit to M. de Mayenne, arrived this evening, and sleeping at the Hôtel Saint Denis.'

'Also true, in fact,' said Poulain; 'the duke is at the Hôtel Saint Denis, and the duchess is with the duke; but, neighbour, where is the use, I pray, in playing it so fine with me? It is not usually the treasurer who is sent to do the commissions of the convent.'

'To a princess, why not?'

'And it is not you, the confidant of Mayneville, who believe in the confessions of Madame the duchess of Montpensier.'

'And why should I believe them?'

'The devil! my dear, you well know the distance from the priory to the middle of the road, since you made me measure it; take care! you tell me so little, that I shall believe a great deal too much, perhaps.'

'And you will be wrong, dear Monsieur Poulain, I know nothing more. And now do not detain me, I beg, for I shall not find madame the duchess.'

'You will always find her at her own house, to which she will return, and where you should wait for her.'

'Ah !' said Borromée, 'I shall not be sorry to see M. the duke for a moment.'

'Come now.'

'For, in fact, you know him; if once I let him slip off to his mistress, there is no putting our hand upon him again.'

'This is to the purpose. Now that I know with whom your affair is, I leave you; adieu, and success.'

Borromée, seeing the road clear, in exchange for the wishes addressed to him, threw a hasty *bon soir* to Nicholas Poulain, and continued his rapid march.

'Well, well, there is always something fresh,' said Nicholas Poulain to himself, regarding the Jacobin's robe which disappeared by degrees in the shade; 'but why the devil do I want to know what passes ? Shall I have any taste, by chance, for the trade I am condemned to follow ? See, then !'

And he retired to bed, not with the calm of a good conscience, but with the quietude given to us, in every position of this world, however false it may be, by the support of one stronger than ourselves.

During this time, Borromée continued his route. He arrived, puffing and blowing, at the Hôtel Saint Denis, at the moment the duke and the duchess, having conversed about their grand affairs, M. de Mayenne was about to take leave of his sister, that he might be free to pay a visit to that lady in the city, of whom we are aware that Joyeuse had to complain.

The brother and sister, after many commentaries upon the reception by the King, and as to the plan of the ten, had agreed as to the following facts :—

The King had no suspicions, and rendered himself, daily, more easy to attack.

The most important point was to organise the league in the provinces of the North, whilst the King abandoned his brother, and forgot Henry of Navarre.

Of these two last enemies, the Duke of Anjou, with his brooding ambition, was the only one to fear; as to Henry of Navarre, they knew by spies well informed, he only busied himself in making love to his three or four mistresses.

'Paris was prepared,' said Mayenne aloud; 'but their

alliance with the royal family gave strength to the politicians and sound royalists; they must wait for a rupture between the King and his allies; this rupture, with the inconstant temper of Henry, could not long delay taking place; but as nothing presses,' continued de Mayenne, 'let us wait.'

'I,' said the duchess, in a low tone, 'was in want of ten men, spread through the different quarters of Paris, to raise the city, after the blow I meditate; I have found these ten men. I demand nothing more.'

They were at this point, the one in his dialogue, the other in her aside, when Mayneville entered suddenly, announcing that Borromée wished to speak to the duke.

'Borromée!' said the duke, surprised, 'who is that?'

'Monseigneur, 'tis he whom you sent to me from Nancy, when I demanded from your highness a man of action and a man of ready wit.'

'I remember, I replied that I had the two in one, and I sent you the Captain Bonoville. Has he changed his name, and is he called Borromée,?'

'Yes, monseigneur, name and uniform. He calls himself Borromée, and is a Jacobin.'

'Bonoville, Jacobin?'

'Yes, monseigneur.'

'And why is he a Jacobin? the devil must well laugh if he has recognised him under the frock.'

'Why is he a Jacobin?' (the duchess made a sign to Mayneville). 'You shall know another time,' she continued; 'tis our secret, monseigneur, and in the meantime let us hear Captain Bonoville, or brother Borromée, as you like.'

'Yes, the more so, as his visit somewhat disturbs me.'

'And me also, I avow,' said Mayneville.

'Then introduce him without losing an instant,' said the duchess. As to the duke, he wavered between the desire to hear the messenger, and the fear of missing the rendezvous with his mistress.

He looked at the door, and then at the clock. The door opened as the clock struck eleven.

'Eh! Bonoville,' said the duke, who could not help laughing, despite a little bad humour; 'how you are disguised, my friend!'

'Monseigneur,' said the captain, 'I am in fact very ill at ease under this devil of a robe; but what must be, must be, as says M. de Guise, senior.'

'It's not I, however, who have stuffed you into that robe, Bonoville,' said the duke; 'do not be angry with me, therefore, I beg of you.'

'No, monseigneur, 'tis madame the duchess, but I am not angry with her as I am at her service.'

'Many thanks, captain; and now let us hear what you have to say to us so late.'

'That which, unfortunately, I have been unable to say to you sooner, monseigneur, for I have the whole priory on my shoulders.'

'Well! now speak.'

'Monsieur the duke,' said Bonoville, 'the King sends assistance to M. the Duke of Anjou.'

'Bah!' said Mayenne, 'we know that song; they have sang it for the last three years.'

'Oh! yes, but this time, monseigneur, I give you the news as true.'

'Hum!' said Mayenne, with a motion of his head like that of a horse that is refractory, 'as certain?'

'This very day even, that is, at two o'clock this morning, M. de Joyeuse started for Rouen. He takes the sea at Dieppe, and carries to Antwerp 3000 men.'

'Oh! oh!' said the duke, 'and who told you this, Bonoville?'

'A man who himself departs for Navarre, monseigneur.'

'To Henry of Navarre?'

'Yes, monseigneur.'

'And on whose part does he visit Henry?'

'On the part of the King. Yes, monseigneur, on the part of the King, and with a letter from the King.'

'Who is this man?'

'He calls himself Robert Briquet.'

'Well?'

'He is a great friend of Dom Gorenflot.'

'A great friend of Dom Gorenflot?'

'They thou and thee each other.'

'Ambassador from the King?'

'This I am assured of; from the priory he sent to the Louvre for a letter of credit, and it was one of our monks who executed the commission.'

'And this monk?'

'Is our little warrior, Jacques Clement, the same you have remarked, Madame the duchess.'

'And he did not communicate this letter to you,' said Mayenne, 'the maladroït !'

'Monseigneur, the King did not deliver it to him, he sent it to the messenger by his own men.'

'We must have this letter, mordieu !'

'Certainly we must have it,' said the duchess.

'How is it you have not thought of this ?' said Mayneville.

'I thought of it so much, that I wished to add one of my own men, a Hercules, to the messenger, but Robert Briquet suspected him, and sent him back.'

'You must go yourself.'

'Impossible.'

'Why so ?'

'He knows me.'

'As a monk, but not as a captain, I hope ?'

'My faith I do not know; this Robert Briquet has a very dangerous eye.'

'What sort of a man is he then ?' said Mayenne.

'A tall, dry fellow, all nerve, all muscle, and all bone ; expert, fond of raillery, and taciturn.'

'Ah ! ah ! and handles the sword ?'

'Like him who invented it, monseigneur.'

'A long face ?'

'Monseigneur, he has all faces.'

'A friend of the prior ?'

'From the time he was a simple friar.'

'Oh ! I have a suspicion,' said Mayenne, knitting his brow, 'and I will clear it up.'

'Act quickly, monseigneur, for, shaped as he is, the galliard must march roundly.'

'Bonoville,' said Mayenne, 'you must go to Soissons, where you will find my brother.'

'But the priory, monseigneur ?'

'Are you then so embarrassed,' said Mayneville, 'in making a history to Dom Modeste, and will he not believe everything you tell him ?'

'You will say to M. de Guise,' continued Mayenne, 'all that you know of the mission of Joyeuse.'

'Yes, monseigneur.'

'And Navarre, which you forget, Mayenne ?' said the duchess.

'I forget it so little, that I take charge of it myself,' replied Mayenne. 'Let them saddle me a fresh horse, Mayneville.'

'Shall he still live ?' and added in a low tone, 'Oh ! yes, he ought to live !'

CHAPTER XXXIV

CHICOT, A LATINIST

AFTER the departure of the two young men, we may remember that Chicot walked at a rapid pace. But as soon as they had disappeared in the valley which crossed by the bridge of Juvisy sur l'Orge, Chicot, who seemed, like Argus, to have the privilege of seeing behind him, and no longer observing Ernauton and Sainte Maline—Chicot stopped at the culminating point of the valley, questioned the horizon, the ditches, the plain, the bushes, the river, all, in fact, to the dappled clouds which glided obliquely behind the large elms on the roadside; and, certain of not having observed any one who watched or inconvenienced him, he seated himself on the other side of a ditch, his back resting against a tree, and commenced what he called an examination of his conscience.

He had two purses of money, for he had perceived that the envelope delivered to him by Sainte Maline, besides the royal letter, contained certain round objects which much resembled gold or silver money.

The envelope was a right royal purse, with a cipher of two H's, one embroidered above and the other beneath.

'Tis pretty,' said Chicot, contemplating the purse, 'tis charming on the part of the King ! His name ! his arms ! He could not be more generous or more stupid. Decidedly I shall never make anything of him ! On my word of honour,' continued Chicot, 'if one thing astonishes me, 'tis that this good and excellent King has not at the same time had embroidered on the same purse, the letter he sends me to carry to his brother-in-law, and my receipt. Why trouble ourselves ? all the political world is out to-day, talking politics, like the rest of them. Bah ! should they do a little in the way of assassination with his poor Chicot, as they have already done with the

courier which the same Henry sent to M. de Joyeuse at Rome, it would be one friend the less, that's all; and friends are so common at the present time, that we may be prodigal of them. May Providence make a bad choice when He chooses! Now let us first see how much money there is in the purse, we will examine the letter afterwards. One hundred crowns, just the very sum I borrowed of Gorenflot. 'Tis royal, on my word! Ah! pardon, let us not calumniate; here's a little packet—Spanish gold—five quadruples; come, come, this is delicate! He is very genteel, is Henriquet! really, were it not for the ciphers and fleurs-de-lis, which appear to me a little superfluous, I would send him a hearty kiss. Now this purse incommodes me; it seems to me that the birds, on passing over my head, will take me for a royal emissary, and laugh at me; or what will be much worse, denounce me to the passengers.'

Chicot emptied his purse into the hollow of his hand, drew from his pocket the plain linen bag of Gorenflot, placed the gold and silver in it, saying to the crowns, 'You can rest quiet together, my children, for you come from the same country.'

Then, drawing in its turn the letter from the envelope, he placed in its stead a stone which he picked up, pulled the strings of the purse round the stone, and launched it, as a slinger, into the Orge, which serpentine beneath the bridge.

The water spouted; two or three circles variegated the calm surface, and after enlarging themselves broke against the shore.

'This for myself,' said Chicot; 'now let us work for Henry.'

And he took up the letter, which he had placed on the ground, to throw the purse more easily into the river.

But there came along the road a donkey loaded with wood.

Two women accompanied the donkey, which marched with a pace as proud as if, instead of wood, he carried relics.

Chicot hid the letter under his large hand, leaning on the ground, and allowed them to pass.

Again alone, he picked up the letter, tore the envelope, broke the seal with the most imperturbable tranquillity, and as though it was a mere simple letter from a lawyer.

He then rolled the envelope in his two hands, smashed

the seal between two stones, and sent the whole to rejoin the purse in the river.

'Now,' said Chicot, 'let us look at the style.'

And he unfolded the letter, and read :—

"OUR VERY DEAR BROTHER,—That profound love which our very dear brother and deceased king, Charles the Ninth, bore you, still exists under the vaults of the Louvre, and obstinately clings to my heart."

Chicot bowed.

"Therefore it is repugnant to me to have to trouble you with sad and vexatious matters; but you are strong in the contrary fortune; so that I no longer hesitate to communicate to you things which are only told to valiant and approved friends."

Chicot interrupted and again bowed.

"Besides," he continued, "I have a royal interest in persuading you, and this interest is the honour of my name, and of yours, my brother.

"In this point we resemble each other, as we are both surrounded with enemies. Chicot will explain it to you."

'Chicotus explicabit!' said Chicot; 'or rather evolvit, which is infinitely more elegant.'

"Your servant, Monsieur the Viscount de Turenne, furnishes daily subjects of scandal at your court. God forbid I should regard your affairs, except for your honour and benefit; but your wife, who, to my great regret, I call my sister, ought to have this care in you in my place and stead; which she has not done."

'Oh! oh!' said Chicot, continuing his Latin translations; 'Quaque omittet facere. 'Tis hard.'

"I recommend you then, my brother, to guard that the relations of Margaret with the Viscount de Turenne, strangely allied with our common friends, do not bring disgrace and injury to the house of Bourbon. Make a strong example the moment you are certain of the fact, and assure yourself of the fact as soon as you have heard Chicot explain my letter."

'Statim atque audeveris Chicotum litteras explicantem. Let us pursue,' said Chicot.

"It would be grievous for the least suspicion to rest upon the legitimacy of your succession, my brother; a precious point, which God forbids me to dream of;

for, alas! I myself am condemned beforehand not to revive in my posterity.

“The two accomplices who, as brother and as king, I denounce to you, meet most part of the time in a small château which they call Loignac; they choose the pretext of the chase; this château is besides a hotbed of intrigues, to which the MM. Guise are no strangers; for you know, without any doubt, my dear Henry, with what a strange love my sister pursued Henry of Guise, and my own brother M. d’Anjou, at the time I bore this title myself, and he was named the Duke of Alençon.”

‘Quo et quam irregulari amore set prosecuta et Henricum Guiseum et germanum meum,’ etc., etc.

“I embrace you, and recommend you my advice, quite ready also to assist you in all and for all. In the meantime, assist yourself with the advice of Chicot, whom I send you.”

‘Age, auctore Chicoto. Good! behold me councillor of the kingdom of Navarre.’

“Your affectionate, etc.”

Having thus read, Chicot placed his head between his two hands.

‘Oh!’ he said, ‘this looks to me like a very unhappy commission, and proves to me that in flying from one evil, as says Horatius Flaccus, we fall into a worse.’

‘In reality, I prefer Mayenne.’

‘And yet, apart his devil of an embroidered satchel, which I do not pardon him, the letter is that of a clever man. In fact, supposing Henriot kneaded of the dough which husbands are usually made of, this letter will embroil him at the same time with his wife, Turenne, Anjou, Guise, and even with Spain. In fact, for Henry of Valois to be so well informed at the Louvre of what takes place with Henry of Navarre at Pau, he must have some spy there, and this spy will greatly puzzle Henriot.’

‘On the other hand, this letter will necessarily draw upon me some disagreeables, if I encounter a Spaniard, a Lorraine, a Bearnais, or a Flamand, curious enough to seek to know what they have sent me to do at Bearn.’

‘But I should have very little foresight, if I did not expect to encounter some of these curious ones.’

‘Monsieur Borromée especially, or I am much mistaken, reserved something for me.’

'The second point.

'Did Chicot seek anything, when he asked for a mission from King Henry ?

'Tranquillity was his object.

'But Chicot is going to embroil the King of Navarre with his wife.

'This is not the business of Chicot, seeing that Chicot, by embroiling among themselves, such high personages, will make himself mortal enemies, who will hinder him from attaining the happy age of eighty.

'My faith ! so much the better, life is nothing when youth is spent.

'But then, must we expect the dagger of M. de Mayenne ?'

'No, for there must be reciprocity in all things.

'Chicot will pursue his journey.

'But Chicot is a man of wit, and Chicot will take his precautions. In consequence, he will only have money about him, so that if they kill Chicot, they injure none but him.

'Chicot then will put the finishing touch to what he has commenced, that is, he will translate from beginning to end this handsome Latin letter, and engrave it in his memory, where it is already two-thirds engraved; he will then purchase a horse, because really, from Tavisy to Pau, he must too often put the right leg before the left.

'But above all things, Chicot will tear to pieces the letter of his friend Henry of Valois, and he will take especial care that these little morsels go, reduced to the state of atoms, some in the Orge, others in the air, and the remainder confided to the earth, our common mother, to whose bosom all return, even the follies of kings.

'When Chicot shall have finished what he has commenced——'

And Chicot interrupted himself to execute his project of division. A third of the letter then went by water, another third by air, and the remaining third disappeared in a hole dug for this purpose with an instrument which was neither a dagger nor a knife, but which might upon occasion replace both, and which Chicot wore at his belt.

When he had finished this operation, he continued :
'Chicot will continue his journey, with the most minute precautions, and he will dine in the good city of Corbeil, like an honest stomach as he is.

'In the meantime,' continued Chicot, 'let us occupy ourselves with the Latin theme which we have decided upon committing to memory; I think we shall compose a very pretty *morceau*.'

Suddenly Chicot stopped; he discovered that he could not translate into Latin the word Louvre; this greatly perplexed him.

He was equally compelled to macaron the word Margaret into Margota, as he had already changed Chicot into Chicotus; seeing that to speak rightly, he must have translated Chicot into Chicot and Margot into Margot, which was not Latin but Greek.

As to Margarita, he never thought of it, the translation, in his opinion, would not have been exact.

All this Latin, with the search after purity, and the Ciceronian turn, conducted Chicot to Corbeil, an agreeable town, where the bold messenger took a slight view of the marvels of Saint Spire, and a long one of a cook-shop and innkeeper who perfumed, with his savoury vapours, the neighbourhood of the cathedral.

We shall not describe the feast he made; we shall not attempt to speak of the horse he bought from the stables of the host; it would impose upon us a task too rigorous; we will only say, that the repast was long enough, and the horse faulty enough to furnish us, if our conscience were less noble, with matter for nearly a volume.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE FOUR WINDS

CHICOT, with his little horse, which ought to have been a very good one to carry so great a personage; Chicot, after sleeping at Fontainebleau, on the next morning made a turn to the right, and pushed on to a small village named Orgeval. He would willingly this day have made a few more leagues, for he appeared desirous of getting away from Paris; but his horse began to stumble so frequently, and so low, that he judged it necessary to halt.

Besides, his eyes, usually so exercised, had not succeeded in distinguishing anything the whole way.

Men, carts, and carriers, had appeared to him perfectly inoffensive.

But Chicot, in safety, at least apparently so, did not on that account live in security; no one indeed, as our readers ought to know, trusted less, and believed less in appearances than Chicot.

Before retiring, therefore, and seeing his horse attended to, he examined the whole house with much attention.

They showed to Chicot superb chambers with three or four entrances; but in the opinion of Chicot these rooms not only had too many doors, but in addition these doors were not sufficiently secured.

The host had just had repaired a large closet without other issue than a door on the staircase; this door was armed with formidable bolts on the inside.

Chicot had a bed prepared in this closet, which he preferred at the first sight to the magnificent rooms without fortifications which had been shown to him.

He tried the bolts in their staples, and satisfied of their play, being both firm and easy, he supped in his chamber, forbid them to take away the table, under the pretence that he sometimes took a snack in the night; supped, undressed, placed his clothes on a chair, and slid into bed.

But, previous to retiring, for greater precaution, he drew from his pocket the purse or rather bag of crowns, and placed them under the bolster, along with his good sword.

He then went three times over the letter, in his mind.

The table served him as a second barricade, and yet this double rampart did not appear to him sufficient; he rose, took a wardrobe in his two long arms, and placed it opposite the door, which it hermitically closed.

So that between him and any possible aggression, he had a door, a table, and a wardrobe.

The hostelry had appeared to Chicot almost uninhabited; the host had a candid countenance. On this night it blew a hurricane, and among the neighbouring trees was heard the frightful cracking, which, if we listen to Lucretia, becomes a sound so sweet and so hospitable for the traveller, well clothed, and covered, and stretched on a good bed.

Chicot, after all his preparations for defence, plunged deliciously into his bed. We must say, the bed was soft,

and so arranged as to guarantee a man from every inquietude, either from men or things.

In fact, he sheltered himself under the curtains of green serge; and a counterpane, thick as eider-down, warmed with a mild heat the limbs of the sleeping traveller.

Chicot had supped as Hippocrates recommends us to do, that is, modestly; he had only drunk a bottle of wine; his stomach, dilated to his pleasure, introduced to the whole organism that sensation of comfort, which communicates, without ever failing, with that complaisant organ supplying the heart amongst many who are called honest men.

Chicot was lighted by a lamp, which he had placed on the ledge of the table, which was close to his bed; he read before he slept, and a little to induce sleep, a very curious and novel book which had just appeared, and which was the work of a certain mayor of Bordeaux, whom they called Montague or Montaigne.

This work had been printed at Bordeaux even in 1581: it contained the first two parts of a work, since well known, and entitled the *Essays*. This book was amusing enough for a man to read and re-read during the day. But it had, at the same time, the advantage of being quite tedious enough not to hinder from sleeping a man who had ridden fifteen leagues on horseback, and had drank his bottle of generous wine for supper.

Chicot much esteemed this work, which, on quitting Paris, he had placed in his pocket, and the author of whom he was personally acquainted with. The Cardinal du Perron had christened it the breviary of honest men; and Chicot, capable in every point of appreciating the taste and wit of the cardinal; Chicot, we say, willingly took the *Essays* of the mayor of Bordeaux for a breviary.

It happened, however, that in reading the eighth chapter he fell into a profound sleep.

The lamp still burned; the door, fortified by the wardrobe, and the table, was still closed; the sword was still at the head of the bed with the crowns. Saint Michael the Archangel would have slept like Chicot, without dreaming of Satan, should he even know the lion roaring the other side of this door, and the wrong side of the bolts.

We have observed that the wind blew loudly; the hissing of this gigantic serpent glided with frightful

melody under the door, and lifted the planks in an awful manner. The wind is the most perfect imitation, or rather the most complete travesty of the human voice; at one time it squalls like a child crying; at another, it imitates, in its groans, the heavy anger of a husband who is quarrelling with his wife.

Chicot was an amateur of tempests; at the expiration of an hour, all this fracas became an element of tranquillity to him, he struggled against all the intemperance of the season,—

Against the cold, with his counterpane;

Against the wind, with his snoring.

And yet, while sleeping, it seemed to Chicot that the tempest increased, and especially, that it approached nearer in an unusual fashion.

On a sudden, a gust of wind, of irresistible strength, shook the door, started the planks and bolts, moved the wardrobe, which lost its balance, and fell on the lamp, which it extinguished, and on the table, which it crushed.

Chicot had the facility, while sleeping comfortably, of quickly awaking, and with all his presence of mind. This presence of mind indicated to him, that it would be better for him to slide to the bedside, than to descend in front from his bed. By gliding to the side, his two nimble hands would rapidly carry themselves to the left on the bag of crowns, the right on the handle of his sword.

Chicot opened his large eyes.

Darkness profound.

Chicot then opened his ears, and it seemed to him that the night was literally torn in pieces by the combat of the four winds which disputed the whole chamber: from the cupboard, which still continued crushing the table, to the chairs, which rolled and clashed against each other, all the while falling foul of the other furniture.

In the midst of all this fracas, it appeared to Chicot as if the four winds had entered his room in real flesh and bone, and that he had an affair with Eurus, Notus, Aquilo, and Boreas, in person, with their bursting cheeks and heavy feet.

Resigned, because he comprehended he could do nothing against the Olympian gods, Chicot crept into the corner of his bedside, like the son of Orlee, after one of his grand furies that Homer relates.

But he held the point of his long sword in a rest, and towards the wind, or rather the winds, in order that in case the mythological individuals inconsiderately approached him, he could spit the whole of them, should the result even equal that which resulted from the wound given by Diomed to Venus.

After a few minutes, however, of the most abominable clatter that had ever defiled a human ear, Chicot profited by a moment's respite given him by the hurricane, to overpower with his voice the unchained elements, and the furniture yielding themselves to a colloquy much too noisy to be natural,—

Chicot cried and vociferated : 'Help !'

At length Chicot made such a noise by himself, that the elements were calmed, as if Neptune in person had pronounced the famous *quos ego* ; and in the course of six or eight minutes, during which Messieurs Eurus, Notus, Boreas, and Aquilo seemed to beat a retreat, the landlord appeared with a lantern and cleared up the drama.

The scene upon which he looked, presented a deplorable aspect, and much resembled that of a field of battle. The large cupboard, upset over the broken table, unmasked the door without hinges, and which, held simply by one of its bolts, oscillated like the sail of a ship; the three or four chairs which completed the furniture, had their backs on the floor and their legs in the air; lastly, the earthenware, which had decked the table, lay smashed and broken on the flagstones.

'Why, this is hell, surely !' exclaimed Chicot, on recognising his host with lantern.

'Oh ! sir,' cried the host, observing the frightful damage that was consummated, 'oh ! sir, what is the matter ?'

And he raised his hands, and consequently his lantern, towards heaven.

'How many devils lodge with you ? tell me, my friend,' roared Chicot.

'Oh ! Jesus ! what weather !' replied the host, with the same pathetic gesture.

'Why the bolts do not hold then !' continued Chicot; 'the house is made of pasteboards; I would much rather leave this, I prefer the plain.'

And Chicot disengaged himself from the side of his bed;

and appeared, sword in hand, in the space left free between the foot of his bed and the wall.

'Oh! my poor furniture!' sighed the host.

'And my clothes!' cried Chicot, 'where are they? my clothes, which were on that chair?'

'Your clothes, my dear sir,' said the host, with simplicity, 'why if they were there, they ought to be there still.'

'How! if they were there; but do you suppose, by chance,' said Chicot, 'that I came here in the costume in which you now behold me?'

And Chicot attempted, but in vain, to cover himself in his short tunic.

'Mon Dieu! sir,' replied the host, somewhat embarrassed how to reply to such an argument, 'I well know you were dressed.'

'Tis lucky you admit that.'

'But——'

'But what?'

'The wind has opened everything, dispersed everything.'

'Ah! that is one reason.'

'You see it plain,' said the host quickly.

'Follow my calculations, however, dear friend,' said Chicot; 'when the wind enters anywhere—and it must have entered here, eh, to cause the disorder I see?'

'Without the least doubt.'

'Well! when the wind enters anywhere, it comes from without?'

'Yes, certainly, sir.'

'You do not dispute it?'

'No, it would be madness.'

'Well! the wind, then, on entering here, ought to bring the clothes of others into my room, instead of carrying mine I know not where.'

'Ah! yes, so it seems to me. However the contrary exists, or appears to exist.'

'Neighbour,' said Chicot, who had explored the floor with a searching glance, 'neighbour, what road has the wind taken to reach me here?'

'Please, sir?'

'I demand of you from whence came the wind?'

'From the north, sir, from the north.'

'Well! it has walked in the mud, for here are the impressions of his shoes on the floor.'

And Chicot indeed showed, on the stones, the recent impression of a muddy shoe.

The host turned pale.

'Now, my dear,' said Chicot, 'if I have any advice to give you, 'tis to look after these sort of winds that enter the auberges, penetrate into the rooms, bursting the doors; and retire, stealing the clothes of travellers.'

The host drew back a couple of steps, to disengage himself from the encumbering furniture, and to reach the entrance to the corridor.

When he now found his retreat secured :—

'Why, do you call me a thief ?' he said.

'Stay, what have you done with your good-natured countenance ?' demanded Chicot; 'I find you completely changed.'

'I change because you insult me.'

'I ?'

'No doubt, you call me a thief,' replied the host, in a tone still more elevated, and much resembling a threat.

'Why, I call you a thief, because you are responsible for my effects, I think; and because my effects have been stolen; you will not deny it ?'

And it was now Chicot, who, in his turn, like a master of arms who touches his adversary, made a threatening gesture.

'Hallo !' cried the host; 'hallo ! come to me, you others !'

At this appeal, four men, armed with sticks, appeared on the staircase.

'Ah ! here are Eurus, Notus, Boreas, and Aquilo,' said Chicot; 'ventre de biche ! since the opportunity presents itself, I will deprive the earth of the north wind; 'tis rendering a service to humanity; there will be an eternal spring.'

And he dealt such a rough blow with his long sword in the direction of the nearest assailant, that if the latter, with the agility of a veritable son of Eurus, had not made a bound backwards, he would have been divided in two.

Unfortunately as, while regarding Chicot, he could not look behind, he fell on the edge of the uppermost step of the staircase; and, not being enabled to keep his centre of gravity, he rolled from the top to the bottom.

This retreat was a signal for the three others, who disappeared by the opening before them, or rather behind

them, with the rapidity of phantoms who sink through a trap-door.

The last, however, who disappeared, had had time, whilst his companions performed their descent, to say a few words in the ear of the host.

'Well, well !' grumbled the latter, 'we will find your clothes.'

'Ah ! well, that is all I ask.'

'And they shall be brought to you.'

'Be it so; not to go out naked is a reasonable wish, I'm thinking.'

His clothes were brought, but visibly deteriorated.

'Oh ! oh !' said Chicot, 'there are plenty of nails in your staircase. What devils of winds. But, in fine, reparation of honour ! how could I suspect you ? you have such an honest countenance.'

The host smiled serenely.

'And now you will go to sleep again, I presume ?'

'No, thank you, I have slept enough.'

'What will you do, then ?'

'You shall lend me your lantern, if you please, and I shall continue my reading,' replied Chicot, with the same agreeableness.

The host said nothing; he simply handed the lantern, and retired.

Chicot replaced his cupboard against the door, and regained his bed.

The night was calm; the wind had lulled, as if the sword of Chicot had penetrated the bottle that contained it.

At daybreak, the ambassador demanded his horse, paid his expenses, and left, saying,—

'We shall see, to-night.'

CHAPTER XXXVI

HOW CHICOT CONTINUED HIS JOURNEY, AND OF
WHAT HAPPENED TO HIM

CHICOT passed the whole morning in applauding himself for the *sang-froid* and patience we have described, during this night of trials.

'But,' he thought, 'they do not twice catch an old fox

in the same trap; it is therefore almost certain that they will invent to-day some new devil's trick on my account; let us keep ourselves on our guard then.'

The result of this reasoning, full of prudence, was, that Chicot, during the whole journey, took a step which Xenophon would not have thought unworthy of immortalising him in his retreat of the Ten Thousand.

Every tree, every hillock, every wall, served him as points of observation or natural fortification.

He had even concluded, as he wended his way, alliances, if not offensive, at least defensive.

In fact, four big grocer merchants of Paris, who were going to Orleans to order their comfitures from Cotignac, and at Limoges their dry fruits, condescended to receive the society of Chicot, who announced himself as a hosier at Bordeaux, returning home after arranging his affairs. And as Chicot, originally a Gascon, had not lost his accent, except when the absence of this accent was particularly necessary to him, he inspired none of his travelling companions with any distrust of him.

This army was composed then of five masters and four grocers' clerks. It was no more despicable as to wit than as to number, seeing the warlike habits introduced since the league, in the manners of the Parisian grocery trade.

We will not affirm that Chicot professed a great respect for the bravery of his companions; but certainly in this case the proverb says true, which certifies that three poltroons together have less fear than one brave man by himself.

Chicot had no fear at all, the moment he found himself with four poltroons. He disdained even to turn himself round, as he had done previously, to observe those who might follow him.

It resulted from this, that they reached, without accident, but talking much on political subjects, and in making forced boastings, the town intended for the supper and lodging of the troop.

They supped, drank neat, and each retired to his chamber.

Chicot had spared, during the repast, neither his jesting mood, which amused his companions, nor the cups of Muscatelle and Burgundy, which kept his sallies flying. They had made a good market for commercials, that is, between free men of His Majesty the King of France and

of all the other majesties, whether of Lorraine, of Navarre, of Flanders, or other places.

But Chicot went to bed, after giving, for the next morning, a rendezvous to his four companions; who had, so to speak, triumphantly conducted him to his room.

Maître Chicot then found himself guarded like a prince, in his corridor, by the four travellers, whose four cells preceded his, situated at the end of a passage, and consequently invulnerable, owing to the intermediate alliances.

Indeed, as at this period the roads were not over safe, even for those who were only bent upon their own affairs, each secured the support of his neighbour in case of accident. Chicot, who had not recounted his misfortunes of the preceding night, had urged the putting in force this article of the treaty, which had in addition been adopted unanimously.

Chicot therefore, might, without failing in his accustomed prudence, go to bed, and go to sleep. He might the more safely do so, as he had, by a reinforcement of prudence, minutely visited his chamber, driven the bolts of his door, and closed the shutter of his window, the only one in the apartment; it is unnecessary to say he had sounded the wall with his fist, and that in every part the wall had returned a satisfactory sound.

But there happened, during his first sleep, an event, that the sphinx himself, that divine, *par excellence*, would never have anticipated; and this is, that the devil was inclined to busy himself about the affairs of Chicot, and that this devil is more cunning than all the sphinxes in the world.

Towards half-past nine, a blow was timidly struck at the door of the grocers' clerks, lodged all four together in a sort of garret above the corridor of the merchants their masters. One of them opened, in a sulky humour, and found himself face to face with the host.

'Messieurs,' said the latter to them, 'I see with great pleasure that you are in bed completely dressed; I wish to render you a great service. Your masters got very warm at table in talking politics. It seems that an alderman of the town heard them, and has reported their sentiments to the mayor. But our town piques itself on being loyal; the mayor has sent the watch, who has seized your masters, and conducted them to the Hôtel de Ville, to explain themselves. The prison is very near the Hôtel

de Ville. My boys, bestir yourselves, your mules await you, your masters shall rejoin you all right.'

The four clerks bounded like deer, bolted down the staircase, jumped on their mules, and took the road to Paris, after charging the host to apprise their masters of their departure, and of the direction taken, if their masters should happen to return to the hostelry.

This done, and having witnessed the disappearance of the four youths at the corner of the street, the host knocked with the same precaution at the first door of the corridor.

He scratched so loud, that the first merchant cried to him in a stentorian voice,—

'Who is there ?'

'Silence ! miserable !' replied the host ; 'come near the door, and walk on your toes.'

The merchant obeyed ; but, as he was a prudent man, he did not open it, but demanded,—

'Who are you !'

'Do you not recognise the voice of your landlord ?'

'It's true, eh ! mon Dieu ! what is the matter ?'

'The matter is, that at table you spoke a little too freely of the King, and that the mayor has been informed of it by some spy, so that the watch has arrived. Luckily I thought of indicating the chamber of your clerks, so that he is occupied above in arresting your clerks instead of arresting yourselves.'

'Oh ! oh ! what is it you are telling me ?' said the merchant.

'The pure and simple truth ! Make haste and save yourselves whilst the staircase is still free.'

'But my companions ?'

'Oh ! you have not the time to give them warning.'

'Poor fellows !'

And the merchant dressed himself in all haste.

During this time, the host, as if struck with a sudden inspiration, tapped with his finger on the partition which separated the first merchant from the second.

The latter, awakened by the same words and the same history, gently opened his door ; the third awoke like the second, called the fourth ; and the whole four, as nimble as a flight of swallows, disappeared, raising their hands to heaven, and walking on the points of their toes.

'That poor hosier,' said they, 'on him the whole must

fall; it's true it was he who said most. My faith! woe betide him, for the host has not the time to warn him like us.'

In fact, Maitre Chicot, as we may presume, had not been apprised at all.

At the very moment the merchants were taking flight, recommending him to God, he was buried in the most profound sleep.

The host assured himself of this by listening at his door; he then descended into the lower hall, the door of which, carefully secured, opened at his signal.

He drew off his cap, and entered.

The room was occupied by six men armed, one of whom appeared to have the right of commanding the others.

'Well!' said the latter.

'Well! Monsieur the officer, I have obeyed in every point.'

'Your auberge is deserted.'

'Absolutely.'

'The person we have indicated has been neither awakened nor apprised?'

'Neither apprised nor awakened.'

'You know, Monsieur the host, in whose name we act; you know whose cause we serve, for you are yourself a defender of this cause.'

'Yes, certainly, sir; and therefore you see that I have sacrificed, to obey my oath, the money which my guests would have expended with me; but it is said in this oath, I will sacrifice my property to the defence of the holy Catholic religion.'

'And my life! you forget that word?' said the officer, in a haughty tone.

'My God!' exclaimed the host, joining his hands; 'is my life demanded of me? I have a wife and children!'

'It will not be demanded of you, if you blindly obey all you are commanded.'

'Oh! I shall obey; be easy.'

'In that case, go to bed, close the doors; and whatever you may see or hear, stir not, were your house on fire, and blazing over your head. You see that your part is not very difficult.'

'Alas! alas! I shall be ruined,' said the host.

'They have charged me to indemnify you,' said the officer; 'take these thirty crowns.'

'My house worth thirty crowns !' said the aubergiste piteously.

'Eh ! vive Dieu ! they won't break you a single window ! you weeping fool. Fie ! the villainous champions of the holy league we have here !'

The host left, and shut himself in like a parliamentarian accused of robbing the town.

The officer then commanded two men, the best armed, to place themselves under Chicot's window. Himself, with the three others, mounted to the lodging of the poor hosier, as he was called by his travelling companions, already far from the town.

'You know the order ?' said the officer. 'If he opens, if he allows himself to be searched, if we do not find about him what we seek, he must not receive the slightest harm ; but if the contrary happens, a neat thrust with the dagger—with the dagger, do you understand ? no pistol, no arquebus. Besides, it is useless, being four to one.'

They had arrived at the door.

The officer knocked.

'Who is there ?' said Chicot, suddenly awaking.

'Pardieu !' said the officer, 'let us be artful.'

'Your friends the grocers, who have something important to communicate to you.'

'Oh ! oh !' said Chicot, 'last night's wine has thickened your voices, my grocers.'

The officer softened his voice, and said in the most insinuating tone,—

'But open then, dear companion and neighbour.'

'Ventre de biche ! how your grocery smells of steel ?' said Chicot.

'Ah ! you will not open ?' cried the officer, getting impatient, 'well then, come break in the door.'

Chicot ran to the window, drew it towards him, and saw below the two naked swords.

'I am taken,' he exclaimed.

'Ah ! ah ! neighbour,' said the officer, who had heard the noise of the window being opened, 'you are afraid of the dangerous jump ; you are right. Come, open to us, open.'

'My faith ! no,' said Chicot ; 'the door is solid, and assistance will arrive when you make the least noise.'

The officer burst into a laugh, and ordered the soldiers to unscrew the hinges.

Chicot commenced halloing to call the merchants.

'Imbecile !' said the officer, 'do you fancy we have left you any help ? undeceive yourself, you are quite alone, and consequently quite lost ! Come, put a good heart on your bad luck. Commence, you !'

And Chicot heard three blows with a musket against the door, with the force and regularity of three battering-rams.

'There are here three muskets and an officer; below, two swords only; fifteen feet to jump, a mere trifle. I prefer the swords to the muskets.'

And tying his bag to his waist, he mounted, without hesitating, on the ledge of the window, holding his sword in his hand.

The two men below held their blades in the air.

But Chicot had guessed right. No man, were he a Goliath, would await the fall of another, were he a pigmy, when this other might kill him in his fall.

The soldiers changed their tactics, and drawing back, decided upon attacking Chicot when he reached the ground.

It was just what the Gascon waited for. He dropped on his points like an expert clown, and remained crouched down; at the same moment one of the men dealt him a blow that would have cut through a wall.

But Chicot did not give himself even the trouble of parrying it. He received the blow full in his throat; but, thanks to the coat of mail of Gorenflot, the blade of his enemy broke like glass.

'He is cuirassed !' said the soldier.

'Pardieu !' replied Chicot, who, by a back-handed stroke, had already cut through his skull.

The other commenced crying out, and thought of nothing but parrying, for Chicot attacked.

Unfortunately, he had not the strength of Jacques Clement. Chicot stretched him, at the second pass, by the side of his comrade.

So that, the door burst in, the officer saw nothing, on looking out of the window, but his two sentinels bathed in their blood.

At fifty paces from the victims, Chicot was tranquilly making his escape.

'He is a demon,' cried the officer; 'he is proof against steel.'

'Yes, but not against lead,' said a soldier, preparing to fire.

'Fool!' exclaimed the officer, striking down the musket. 'Noise! why you will awaken the whole town; we shall meet with him again to-morrow.'

'Ah! there it is,' said one of the soldiers, philosophically; 'we must place four men below, and only two above.'

'You are a fool!' replied the officer.

'We shall see what M. the Duke will say to him!' grumbled the soldier, by way of consolation.

And he rested the butt of his musket on the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THIRD DAY OF THE JOURNEY

CHICOT was only retiring with this gentleness because he was at Etamps, that is in a town, in the midst of a population, under the safeguard of a certain number of magistrates, who, on his first requisition, would have given free course to justice, and would have arrested M. de Guise himself.

His assailants were perfectly aware of their false position. The officer, therefore, as we have seen, at the risk of allowing Chicot to escape, forbid his soldiers the use of noisy weapons.

It was for the same reason that he abstained from pursuing Chicot, who would, at the first attempt to follow him, have uttered cries to awaken the whole town.

The little troop, reduced a third, took refuge in the darkness, abandoning, to be less compromised, the two bodies, and leaving their swords near them, that it might be supposed that they had killed each other.

Chicot looked in vain about the quarter for the merchants and their clerks.

And, as he supposed that those with whom he had been engaged, seeing their object had failed, would not think of remaining in the town, he decided that it would be his best plan to rest there.

He did more; after making a turn, and, from the

corner of the neighbouring street, having heard the retreating steps of the horses, he had the audacity to return to the hostelry.

He there found the host, who had not yet recovered his *sang-froid*; and who allowed him to saddle his horse in the stable, regarding him with the same amazement that he would a phantom.

Chicot profited by this welcome stupor, to save his expenses, which, for his part, the host took care not to reclaim.

He then went, to finish his night, to the large hall of another hostelry, in the midst of all the tipplers, who were far from supposing that this great unknown, with a smiling countenance and graceful manners, had, instead of being murdered, killed two men.

Daybreak found him *en route*, a prey to inquietude, which increased every moment. Two attempts had luckily failed; a third might be fatal to him.

At this moment he would have compounded with all the Guisards, quit in narrating to them all the fables he knew so well how to invent.

A copse of trees gave him apprehensions it is difficult to describe; a ditch made him shudder throughout; a wall, somewhat high, almost threw him backwards.

From time to time he promised, when once at Orleans, to send to the King a courier, to demand an escort from town to town.

But as the road to Orleans was deserted and quite safe, Chicot thought he should appear very much like a poltroon; that the King would lose his good opinion of Chicot; and, that an escort would be very inconvenient. Besides, a hundred ditches, fifty hedges, twenty walls, ten copses, had already been passed without the least suspicious object having shown itself on the branches or on the walls.

But, after Orleans, Chicot felt his terrors redouble; four o'clock approached, that is to say, the night. The road was like a wood, it ascended like a ladder; the traveller, lengthening his shadow along the gray limestone, appeared like a black mark for any one who felt a desire of sending towards him the ball of an arquebus.

On a sudden, Chicot heard at a distance a certain noise similar to the rolling shake of the ground made by horses when galloping.

He turned round, and at the bottom of the hill of which

he had attained the middle, he saw some horsemen ascending with all haste.

He counted them, there were seven. Four had muskets on their shoulders.

The setting sun drew from each barrel a long stream of a blood red.

The horses of these cavaliers gained fast upon Chicot's horse. Chicot, besides, had no ambition of engaging in a struggle of rapidity, the result of which would have been to diminish his resources in case of attack.

He simply made his horse travel in zigzag, to prevent the arquebusiers from making him a target.

It was not without a deep knowledge of the arquebus in general, and arquebusiers in particular, that Chicot employed this manœuvre; for at the moment the cavaliers were about fifty paces from him, he was saluted with four coups; of which, following the direction from which the cavaliers fired, three passed over his head.

Chicot expected, as we have seen, these four coups; he had therefore arranged his plan beforehand. On hearing the balls whistle, he abandoned the reins, and let himself down from his horse. He had taken the precaution of drawing his sword from its scabbard, and held in the left hand a dagger, which cut like a razor, and pointed like a needle.

He dropped in such a mode, that his legs were springs doubled up, but ready to extend themselves at the same time; thanks to the position contrived in his fall, his head was sheltered by the breast of his horse.

A cry of joy issued from the group of cavaliers, who, on seeing Chicot fall, naturally supposed Chicot was dead.

'I told you right, imbecile,' said a man masked, riding up in a gallop; 'you have all failed, because you did not follow my orders to the letter. This time he is down, dead or alive, let him be searched; and if he stirs, why let him be finished.'

'Yes, sir,' respectfully replied one of the men in the party.

And each dismounted, with the exception of one soldier, who collected all the bridles and guarded the horses.

Chicot was not precisely a pious man; but in such a moment he believed there was a God, that this God opened his arms to him, and that before five minutes, perhaps, the sinner would appear before his judge.

He muttered a sombre and fervent prayer, which was certainly heard above.

Two men approached Chicot; each had a sword in his hand.

They plainly saw that Chicot was not dead, from the manner in which he groaned.

As he did not stir, and made no preparations to defend himself, the most zealous of the two had the imprudence to approach within reach of his left hand; instantly the dagger, driven as if with a spring, entered his throat, on which the shaft was impressed as upon wax. At the same time, a moiety of the sword which Chicot held in his right hand disappeared in the loins of the second cavalier, who had endeavoured to escape.

'Tudieu !' cried the chief. 'There is treason, charge the arquebuses, the rascal is a good life yet.'

'Yes, certainly, I am still living,' said Chicot, whose eyes shot flashes of lightning; and quick as thought he rushed upon the chief cavalier, directing his point at the mask.

But already two soldiers had enveloped him; he turned round, opened the thigh of one with a heavy blow of his sword, and disengaged himself.

'Boys ! boys !' cried the chief, 'the arquebuses, mordieu !'

'Before the arquebuses are ready,' said Chicot, 'I shall have let loose your entrails, brigand; and I shall have cut the cords of your mask that I may know who you are.'

'Hold firm, sir; hold firm, and I will guard you,' said a voice, which to Chicot had the effect of descending from heaven.

'Twas the voice of a handsome young man, mounted on a fine black horse. He had two pistols in his hand, and cried to Chicot,—

'Stoop down, stoop down, morbleu; stoop down, then.'

Chicot obeyed.

A pistol was fired, and a man rolled at the feet of Chicot, his sword escaping from him.

The horses however were fighting; the three surviving cavaliers attempted to gain their stirrups, but could not manage it; the young man, in the midst of the *melée*, drew his second pistol, which reached another of the soldiers.

'Two and two,' said Chicot; 'generous preserver, take yours, here is mine.'

And he fell upon the masked cavalier, who, trembling with rage or fear, faced him however like a man accustomed to the use of weapons.

On his side, the young man had seized in his arms the body of his adversary, had thrown him to the ground, without even taking a sword in his hand, and bound him with his sash like a lamb in the slaughter-house.

Chicot, on finding himself opposed to a single adversary, recovered his *sang-froid*, and consequently his superiority.

He roughly pushed his man, who was endowed with a respectable corpulence, drove him to the ditch by the roadside, and upon a second feint, buried the point of his sword in the middle of his ribs.

The man fell.

Chicot put his foot on the sword of his vanquished enemy, that he might not again use it; and with his poniard cut the cords of his mask.

'M. de Mayenne!' he said. 'Ventre de biche! I suspected it.'

The duke replied not; he had fainted, partly from the loss of blood and partly from the fall.

Chicot scratched his nose in his usual manner when he had any act of great importance to perform. After a minute's reflection, he tucked up his sleeve, took his large dagger, and approached the duke, for the purpose of simply and purely cutting off his head.

But he now felt a hand of iron grasping his own, and heard a voice which said to him,—

'Fair play, sir, an enemy must not be killed when down.'

'Young man,' replied Chicot, 'you have saved my life, it is true; I return you my heartfelt thanks for it; but accept a short lesson, very useful in these times of moral degradation in which we live at present. When a man has submitted to three attacks in three days; when he has three times ran the risk of his life; when he is still quite warm with the blood of his enemies, who have fired upon him at a distance, without any provocation on his part, and with four arquebuses at once, as they would have done to a wolf gone mad; at such a time, young man, this valiant personage, permit me to tell you so, may boldly do what I am going to do.'

And Chicot seized the neck of his enemy, to finish his operation.

But this time the young man again arrested him.

'You shall not do it, sir,' he said, 'so long as I am here; at least. They do not thus shed entirely blood like that which flows from the wound you have already made.'

'Bah !' said Chicot, with surprise, 'you know this wretch ?'

'This wretch is M. the Duke de Mayenne, a prince equal in grandeur to many a king.'

'A stronger reason,' said Chicot, in a sombre voice; 'but who are you ?'

'I am he who saved your life, sir,' replied the young man coldly.

'And who, near Charenton, if I do not mistake, delivered me a letter from the King, about three days ago.'

'Precisely.'

'Then you are in the service of the King, sir ?'

'I have that honour,' replied the young man, bowing.

'And being in the service of the King, you indulge M. de Mayenne ? Mordieu ! sir, permit me to tell you, this is not rendering good service.'

'I think, on the contrary, sir, that I am the good servant of the King at this moment.'

'Perhaps !' said Chicot, sorrowfully, 'perhaps ! but this is not an occasion for philosophising ; what is your name ?'

'Ernauton de Carmainges, sir.'

'Well ! Monsieur Ernauton de Carmainges, what shall we do with this carcass, equal in size to all the kings on earth ? For as to myself, I am off, I give you notice.'

'I will take charge of M. de Mayenne, sir.'

'And the companion, who is listening there, what shall you do with him ?'

'The poor devil hears nothing, I have bound him too tight for that, in my opinion; and he has fainted.'

'Come, Monsieur de Carmainges, you have saved my life to-day, but you will furiously compromise it by-and-by.'

'I do my duty to-day, God will provide for the future.'

'May it happen as you desire; besides, I hate killing a man without defence, although the man were my most cruel enemy; so therefore adieu, sir.'

And Chicot pressed the hand of Ernauton.

'Perhaps he is right,' he said to himself, leaving to take his horse, and then returning,—

'Au fait !' he said, 'you have seven good horses there, I think I have earned four to my share, assist me then to choose one; are you a connoisseur in horse-flesh ?'

'Take mine,' replied Ernauton, 'I know what he can do.'

'Ah ! 'tis too great a generosity, keep him for yourself.'

'No, I have not so much need of travelling speedily as you.'

Chicot did not allow himself to be pressed, he mounted the horse of Carmainges, and disappeared.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

ERNAUTON DE CARMAINGES

ERNAUTON remained on the field of battle, greatly embarrassed as to what he should do with the two enemies, who would open their eyes in his arms.

In the interim, as there was no danger of their running away, and as it was probable that Maître Robert Briquet (it was under this name, we may remember, that Ernauton knew Chicot), and, as it was probable, we say, that Maître Robert Briquet would not return to finish them, the young man went in search of some auxiliary; and was not long in finding, in the very road, what he sought for.

A cart, which Chicot must have passed on his road, appeared at the summit of the hill, standing in bold relief against a sky reddened by the setting sun.

The cart was drawn by two oxen, and conducted by a peasant.

Ernauton accosted the conductor, who had a great desire on perceiving him, to abandon his cart, and escape into the thicket, and narrated to him, that a combat had taken place between the Huguenots and Catholics; that this combat had been fatal to four of them, but that two had survived.

The peasant, greatly alarmed at the responsibility of a good deed, but more frightened still at the warlike

The first of these was the discovery of gold in California in 1848. This led to a great influx of people to the West, and the discovery of gold in Colorado in 1859 led to a similar influx. The discovery of gold in California was made by James W. Wicks, a man who had been a prospector in California since 1846. He discovered gold in a stream called the American River, and his discovery led to the discovery of gold in California by many other people.

The second of these was the discovery of gold in Colorado in 1859. This led to a great influx of people to the West, and the discovery of gold in Colorado was made by James W. Wicks, a man who had been a prospector in California since 1846. He discovered gold in a stream called the American River, and his discovery led to the discovery of gold in Colorado by many other people.

The third of these was the discovery of gold in California in 1848. This led to a great influx of people to the West, and the discovery of gold in California was made by James W. Wicks, a man who had been a prospector in California since 1846. He discovered gold in a stream called the American River, and his discovery led to the discovery of gold in California by many other people.

The fourth of these was the discovery of gold in Colorado in 1859. This led to a great influx of people to the West, and the discovery of gold in Colorado was made by James W. Wicks, a man who had been a prospector in California since 1846. He discovered gold in a stream called the American River, and his discovery led to the discovery of gold in Colorado by many other people.

The fifth of these was the discovery of gold in California in 1848. This led to a great influx of people to the West, and the discovery of gold in California was made by James W. Wicks, a man who had been a prospector in California since 1846. He discovered gold in a stream called the American River, and his discovery led to the discovery of gold in California by many other people.

The sixth of these was the discovery of gold in Colorado in 1859. This led to a great influx of people to the West, and the discovery of gold in Colorado was made by James W. Wicks, a man who had been a prospector in California since 1846. He discovered gold in a stream called the American River, and his discovery led to the discovery of gold in Colorado by many other people.

The seventh of these was the discovery of gold in California in 1848. This led to a great influx of people to the West, and the discovery of gold in California was made by James W. Wicks, a man who had been a prospector in California since 1846. He discovered gold in a stream called the American River, and his discovery led to the discovery of gold in California by many other people.



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“ Eh! Bonoville,” said the duke, “how you are disguised, my friend!”

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appearance of Ernauton, assisted the young man to transport M. de Mayenne into his cart; then the soldier, who, swooned or not, continued to keep his eyes closed.

There remained the four bodies.

'Sir,' said the peasant, 'were these four men Catholics or Huguenots?'

Ernauton had seen the peasant, at the moment of his fright, make the sign of the cross.

'Huguenots,' he said.

'In that case,' replied the peasant, 'there can be no harm in my searching these heathens, eh?'

'None,' replied Ernauton, who wished that the peasant, with whom he had to do, should inherit, in preference to the first comer.

The peasant did not wait to be told twice, and turned out the pockets of the dead.

The dead had been well paid when living, as it appeared; for, the operation terminated, the face of the peasant became animated.

It resulted from the pleasure that spread through his body and soul, at the same time that he piqued his beasts more roughly, in order to arrive more quickly at his cottage.

It was in the stable of this excellent Catholic, that, on a good bed of straw, M. de Mayenne recovered his senses. The pain caused by the jolting of the cart had not succeeded in reviving him; but when some spring water, poured on the wound, made a few drops of vermillion blood to flow, the duke opened his eyes, and regarded the men and surrounding objects with a surprise easy to be imagined.

As soon as M. de Mayenne had opened his eyes, Ernauton dismissed the peasant.

'Who are you, sir?' demanded the duke.

Ernauton smiled.

'Do you not recognise me, sir?' he said to him.

'Yes,' replied the duke, knitting his brow, 'you are the one who came to the assistance of my enemy.'

'Yes,' replied Ernauton, 'but I am also him who hindered your enemy from killing you.'

'It must, in reality, be so,' said Mayenne, 'since I am alive, unless, indeed, he thought me dead.'

'He left, knowing you to be alive.'

'At least, he thought my wound mortal.'

'I do not know; but, at all events, if I had not opposed it, he would have given you one that would have been so.'

'But in that case, sir, why have you assisted in slaying my men, to prevent this man afterwards from killing me?'

'Nothing more simple, sir; and I am astonished that a gentleman—you appear to me to be one—does not comprehend my conduct. Chance led me on the road you were following; I saw several men attack one individual, I defended the single man; and when this brave man, to whose assistance I came, for whoever he is, sir, this man is brave; when this brave man, left alone with you, had decided the victory by the wound which you received, then, seeing that he was about to abuse his victory by killing you, I interposed my sword.'

'You know me, then?' demanded Mayenne, with a scrutinising look.

'I do not want to know you, sir; I know that you are wounded, and that is sufficient for me.'

'Be frank, sir,' continued Mayenne, 'you know me?'

'It is strange, sir, that you do not consent to comprehend me; for my part, I do not consider it more noble to kill a man without defence, than for six to attack one man who is on his journey.'

'You admit, however,' replied Mayenne; 'that, at all events, there might be reasons for it?'

Ernauton bowed, but said nothing.

'Did you not see,' continued Mayenne, 'that I crossed my sword hand to hand with this man?'

'I saw it, it's quite true.'

'Besides, this man is my mortal enemy.'

'I believe so, for he told me the same thing of you.'

'And if I survive my wound?'

'That is no affair of mine, and you will do as you please, sir.'

'Do you think me very dangerously wounded?'

'I have examined your wound, sir, and I think that, although serious, it will not endanger your life. The steel glided along the ribs, as I think, and has not penetrated the chest. Breathe, and I trust, you will feel no pain in the region of the lungs.'

Mayenne respired painfully, but without interior suffering.

'Tis true,' he said, 'but the men who were with me?'

'Are dead, with the exception of one.'

'Are they left in the road, then ?' said Mayenne.

'Yes.'

'Have they been searched ?'

'The peasant, whom you must have seen on opening your eyes, and who is your host, acquitted himself of that ceremony.'

'What did he find upon them ?'

'Some money.'

'Any papers ?'

'I do not know.'

'Ah !' said Mayenne, with evident satisfaction.

'Besides, you can obtain information from the one who lives.'

'But where is the one who lives ?'

'In the barn; not two steps from hence.'

'Carry me to him, or rather, have him brought to me; and if you are a man of honour, as I believe, swear to me to ask him no question.'

'I am not curious, sir, and of this affair I know all that it is necessary for me to know.'

The duke regarded Ernauton with a lurking inquietude.

'Sir,' said the latter, 'I should be glad if you would charge some other with the commission you would favour me with.'

'I was wrong, sir, and I admit it,' said Mayenne; 'have the extreme kindness to render me the service I ask.'

Five minutes afterwards, the soldier entered the stable.

He uttered an exclamation on perceiving the Duke de Mayenne; but the latter had strength enough to place his fingers on his lips; the soldier was immediately silent.

'Sir,' said Mayenne to Ernauton, 'my gratitude shall be eternal; and no doubt, some day, we shall meet under happier circumstances; may I ask, to whom I have the honour of speaking ?'

'I am the Viscount Ernauton de Carmainges, sir.'

Mayenne expected a longer detail, but it was the part of the young man to be reserved.

'You were following the road to Beaugency, sir ?' continued Mayenne.

'Yes, sir.'

'Then I have deranged you, and you cannot proceed to-night, perhaps ?'

'On the contrary, sir; and I intend to be *en route* presently.'

'For Beaugency ?'

Ernauton regarded Mayenne, like a man whom this persistence greatly displeased.

'For Paris,' he said.

The duke appeared astonished.

'Pardon,' continued Mayenne, 'but it is strange that, going to Beaugency, and arrested by a circumstance so unforeseen, you abandon the object of your journey without a very serious cause ?'

'Nothing more simple, sir,' replied Ernauton; 'I was hastening to a rendezvous; our event, by forcing me to remain here, has rendered it impossible to keep my appointment; I am, therefore, returning.'

Mayenne attempted in vain to read, on the impassible features of Ernauton, any other thought than the one his words had expressed.

'Oh, sir!' he said at length, 'why do you not remain with me a few days ? I will send my soldier to Paris, to obtain a surgeon for me; for you perceive, no doubt, that I cannot remain here alone with these peasants, who are unknown to me.'

'And why, sir,' replied Ernauton, 'cannot your soldier remain with you, whilst I send you a surgeon ?'

Mayenne hesitated.

'Do you know the name of my enemy ?' he asked.

'No, sir.'

'What ! you have saved his life, and he has not told you his name ?'

'I did not demand it of him.'

'You did not demand it of him ?'

'I have saved your life also, sir; have I, for that reason, demanded yours ? But, in return, you both know mine. What necessity is there, that the preserver should know the name of him he has obliged ? 'Tis the obliged, who should know the name of his preserver.'

'I see, sir,' said Mayenne, 'that there is nothing to be learned from you, and that you are discreet as well as valiant.'

'And I, sir, see, that you pronounce these words by way of reproach, and I regret it; for, really, that which alarms you ought, on the contrary, to reassure you. We are not very discreet with the one, without being a little so with the other.'

'You are right; your hand, Monsieur de Carmainges.'

Ernauton gave him his hand, but without anything in his manner indicating a knowledge that he was giving his hand to a prince.

'You have questioned my conduct, sir,' continued Mayenne; 'I cannot justify myself without revealing important secrets. I think it will be better that we do not push our confidences further.'

'Observe, sir,' replied Ernauton, 'that you defend yourself without my accusing you. You are perfectly free, believe me, to speak or to remain silent.'

'Thanks, sir, I shall be silent; know, however, that I am a gentleman of good family, in a position to give you every pleasure I may wish.'

'Let us finish here, sir,' replied Ernauton, 'and be assured, that I shall be as discreet respecting your credit as I have been respecting your name. Thanks to the master I serve, I stand in need of no one.'

'Your master!' said Mayenne, with surprise; 'what master, if you please?'

'Ah! no more confidences; you proposed it yourself, sir,' replied Ernauton.

'Right.'

'And besides, your wound is beginning to inflame; talk less, sir; talk less.'

'You are right. Ah! I must have my surgeon.'

'I return to Paris, as I have had the honour of telling you; give me his address.' Mayenne signed to the soldier, who approached him; and the two conversed in a low tone. With his usual discretion, Ernauton removed to a distance.

At length, after a few minutes of consultation, the duke turned round to Ernauton:—

'Monsieur de Carmainges,' he said, 'your word of honour that if I give you a letter for some one, this letter will be faithfully delivered to that person.'

'I give it you, sir.'

'And I believe in it; you are too gallant a man, for me not to trust you blindly.'

Ernauton bowed.

'I shall confide to you a part of my secret,' said Mayenne; 'I belong to the guards of Madame the Duchess of Montpensier.'

'Ah!' said Ernauton innocently, 'Madame the Duchess of Montpensier has her guards: I was ignorant of it.'

'In these troubled times, sir,' replied Mayenne, 'every one secures himself as he best can; and the house of Guise, being a royal house——'

'I demand no explanation, sir, you are one of the guards of Madame the Duchess of Montpensier, that is sufficient for me.'

'I continue, then; I was commissioned to make a journey to Ambroise, when, on my way, I encountered my enemy, you know the rest.'

'Yes,' said Ernauton.

'Arrested by this wound, before accomplishing my mission, I must account to Madame the Duchess for the cause of my delay.'

'Very right.'

'You will deliver, then, into her own hands, the letter I shall have the honour of writing her.'

'If there is paper and ink here,' said Ernauton, rising to search for these objects.

'Unnecessary,' said Mayenne; 'my soldier should have my tablets about him.'

And the soldier, in fact, drew from his pocket, portable writing materials firmly secured. Mayenne turned himself towards the wall to touch a spring, the tablets opened, he wrote a few lines with a crayon, and closed up the tablets with the same mystery.

When closed, it was impossible, if ignorant of the secret, to open them without breaking.

'Sir,' said the young man, 'in three days, the letter shall be delivered.'

'Into the proper hands?'

'To the Duchess of Montpensier herself.'

The duke pressed the hands of his kind companion; and fatigued, both with the conversation he had held, and with the letter he had written, he fell back, with the perspiration on his face, upon the fresh straw.

'Sir,' said the soldier, in a language which, to Ernauton, appeared little in harmony with his costume, 'sir, you bound me like a calf, it's true; but whether you will or not, I regard this binding as a chain of friendship, and will prove it you at a fitting time and place.'

And he extended to him a hand, the whiteness of which the young man had already noticed.

'Be it so,' said Carmainges, smiling; 'here, then, I have two additional friends.'

'Don't despise them, sir,' said the soldier; 'we have never too many.'

'It's true, comrade,' replied Ernauton.
And he departed.

CHAPTER XXXIX

THE COURTYARD

ERNAUTON departed the same moment, and as he had taken the horse of the duke in place of his own, which he had given to Robert Briquet, he travelled speedily, so that, about the middle of the third day, he arrived at Paris.

At three o'clock in the afternoon, he entered the Louvre, and the lodging of the Forty-Five.

No event of importance had signalised his arrival.

The Gascons, on seeing him, uttered exclamations of surprise.

M. de Loignac, hearing these cries, entered, and perceiving Ernauton, assumed his most haughty appearance; which, however, did not prevent Ernauton from walking straight to him.

M. de Loignac signed to the young man to pass into the little cabinet situated at the end of the dormitory, a sort of audience hall, where this judge without appeal rendered his decrees.

'Is this the way to conduct yourself, sir?' he said to him at once; 'there are, if I reckon right, five days and five nights of absence; and 'tis you, you sir, whom I thought one of the most reasonable, who give the example of such an infraction?'

'Sir,' replied Ernauton, bowing, 'I have done what I was told to do.'

'And what were you told to do?'

'I was told to follow M. de Mayenne, and I have followed him.'

'For five days and five nights?'

'For five days and five nights, sir.'

'The duke has quitted Paris, then?'

'The same evening, and this appeared to me suspicious.'

'You did right, sir. Well?'

Ernauton then narrated succinctly, but with the warmth

and energy of a man of courage, the adventure of the road, and the results which this adventure brought about. As he advanced in his recital, the excited features of M. de Loignac were cleared of all the impressions which the narrator had raised in his mind.

But when Ernauton came to the letter, confided to his care by M. de Mayenne,—

‘You have this letter?’ exclaimed M. de Loignac.

‘Yes, sir.’

‘The devil! this deserves some attention to be paid to it,’ replied the captain; ‘wait for me, sir; or rather, come with me, I beg of you.’

Ernauton followed his conductor, and arrived, behind him, in the courtyard of the Louvre.

They were all engaged in preparing for the King’s going out, the equipages were being arranged. M. d’Epernon was observing the trial of two horses recently arrived from England, a present from Elizabeth to Henry the Third. These two horses, remarkably well matched, were to-day to be harnessed to the King’s coach, for the first time.

M. de Loignac (whilst Ernauton remained at the entrance of the courtyard) approached M. d’Epernon, and touched him by the skirt of his cloak.

‘News! Monsieur the Duke,’ he said, ‘great news.’

The duke quitted the group in which he had mixed, and approached the stairs by which the King was to descend.

‘Speak, Monsieur de Loignac, speak.’

‘M. de Carmainges has arrived from near Orleans; M. de Mayenne is at a village, dangerously wounded.’

The duke uttered an exclamation.

‘Wounded!’ he repeated.

‘And more,’ continued Loignac, ‘he has written to Madame de Montpensier a letter, which M. de Carmainges has in his pocket.’

‘Oh! oh!’ said d’Epernon, ‘parfandious! bring M. de Carmainges here, that I may speak to him myself.’

Loignac took Ernauton by the hand, who had, as we have said, kept himself at a distance, from respect, during the colloquy of the chiefs.

‘Monsieur the Duke,’ he said, ‘here is our traveller.’

‘Good! Sir, you have, it appears, a letter from M. the Duke de Mayenne?’ said d’Epernon.

'Yes, monseigneur.'

'And addressed to Madame de Montpensier?'

'Yes, monseigneur.'

'Will you be good enough to hand me this letter, if you please?'

And the duke extended his hand, with the easy negligence of a man, who thinks he has but to express his will, whatever it may be, and to have it satisfied.

'Pardon, monseigneur,' said Carmainges, 'but did you not tell me to hand you the letter of M. de Mayenne to his sister?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'M. the Duke cannot but be aware that this letter is confided to me.'

'What matter?'

'It matters much, monseigneur; I have given M. the Duke my word, that this letter should be delivered to the duchess herself.'

'Are you in the service of the King, or of M. de Mayenne?'

'I belong to the King, monseigneur.'

'Well! the King would wish to see this letter.'

'Monseigneur, it is not you who are the King.'

'I really think you forget to whom you are speaking, Monsieur de Carmainges,' said d'Epernon, becoming pale with rage.

'I am perfectly aware of it, on the contrary, monseigneur; and it is on that account I refuse.'

'You refuse; you said you refused, I think, Monsieur de Carmainges?'

'I said so.'

'Monsieur de Carmainges, you forget your oath of fidelity.'

'Monseigneur, I have not sworn fidelity up to the present time, that I know of, except to one person, and that person is His Majesty. If the King demands this letter of me, he shall have it; for the King is my master, but the King is not here.'

'Monsieur de Carmainges,' said the duke, who was evidently getting beyond himself, whilst Ernauton, on the contrary, appeared to get cooler, as by degrees he resisted; 'Monsieur de Carmainges, you are like the rest of your countrymen, blind in prosperity; your fortune dazzles you, my little gentleman; the possession of a state secret stupefies you like the blow of a mallet.'

'That which stupefies me, Monsieur the Duke, is, the disgrace I am near falling into with your lordship; but which neither my fortune, nor my refusal to obey you, renders, I do not conceal it, very dangerous; but no matter, I do my duty, and no more; and no one, except the King, shall have the letter you demand from me, unless it is the person to whom it is addressed.'

M. d'Epernon made a terrible movement.

'Loignac,' he said, 'you will, on the very instant, conduct M. de Carmaingès to the dungeon.'

'It is certain, that by this mode,' said Carmaingès, smiling, 'I shall not be enabled to deliver to Madame de Montpensier the letter of which I am the bearer, as long as I remain in the dungeon at least; but once out——'

'If you do come out, you may add,' said d'Epernon.

'I shall come out, sir, unless you have me assassinated,' said Ernauton, with a resolution, which, as he spoke, became more cold and more terrible; 'yes, I shall quit it, the walls are less firm than my determination. Well! sir, once out——'

'Well! once out?'

'Why, I shall speak to the King, and the King will reply to me.'

'To the dungeon, to the dungeon,' hurled d'Epernon, losing all control; 'to the dungeon, and let them take this letter.'

'Not one shall touch it,' exclaimed Ernauton, making a bound backwards, and drawing from his bosom the tablets of Mayenne, 'I will tear the letter in pieces, since I can only save it at this price; and this, M. the Duke de Mayenne will approve of, and His Majesty will pardon.'

And the young man, in his loyal resistance, was preparing to separate in two the precious envelope, when a hand gently stayed his progress.

If the pressure had been violent, no doubt the young man would have redoubled his efforts to destroy the letter; but finding they used caution, he stopped, turning his head over his shoulder.

'The King!' he said.

In fact, the King, on leaving the Louvre, had descended his staircase, and resting a moment on the last step, he had listened to the end of the discussion, and his royal hand had arrested the arm of Carmaingès.

'What is the matter, gentlemen?' he demanded, in that voice to which he knew how to give, when he wished, a power quite royal.

'It is, sir,' said d'Epéron, without giving himself the trouble to conceal his rage, 'it is that this man, one of your Forty-Five, for that matter he shall cease to be one, it is, that sent by me in your name, to watch M. de Mayenne during his stay at Paris, he has followed him as far as Orleans, and there he has received a letter from him, addressed to Madame de Montpensier.'

'You have received a letter from M. de Mayenne to Madame de Montpensier?' said the King.

'Yes, sire,' replied Ernauton; 'but M. the Duke d'Epéron does not tell you under what circumstances.'

'Well! this letter,' said the King, 'where is it?'

'That is exactly the cause of quarrel, sire; M. de Carmainges absolutely refuses to give it me, and would carry it to its address, a refusal which is not good servitude, I think.'

The King regarded Ernauton.

The young man put one knee on the ground.

'Sire,' he said, 'I am a poor gentleman, a man of honour, nothing more. I have saved the life of your messenger, whom M. de Mayenne and five of his retainers were about to assassinate; for, by arriving in time, I made the chances of combat turn in his favour.'

'And during this combat, did nothing happen to M. de Mayenne?' said the King.

'Yes, sire, he was wounded, and grievously so.'

'Good,' said the King; 'what then?'

'What then, sire?'

'Yes.'

'Your messenger, who appeared to have some private cause of hatred against M. de Mayenne——'

The King smiled.

'Your messenger, sire, wished to finish his enemy; perhaps he had the right to do so; but I considered that in my presence, that is, in the presence of a man whose sword belongs to your Majesty, this vengeance would become a political assassination, and——'

Ernauton hesitated.

'Finish,' said the King.

'And I saved M. de Mayenne from your messenger, as I had saved your messenger from M. de Mayenne.'

D'Epernon shrugged his shoulders, Loignac nibbled his long moustache, the King remained passive.

'Continue,' he said.

'M. de Mayenne, reduced to a single companion—the four others were dead—M. de Mayenne reduced, I say, to a single companion, and unwilling to separate himself from him, ignorant that I belonged to your Majesty, trusted in me, and requested me to carry a letter to his sister. I have this letter, it is here; I offer it to your Majesty, sire, to dispose of it as you will dispose of me. My honour is dear to me, sire; but from the moment I have to answer to my conscience the guarantee of the royal pleasure, I shall transfer my honour, it is in good hands, sire.'

Ernauton, still kneeling, presented the tablets to the King.

The King pushed them gently aside with his hand.

'What were you saying then, d'Epernon; M. de Carmainges is an honest man, and a faithful servant.'

'I! sire!' said d'Epernon; 'your Majesty asks what I was saying?'

'Yes, did I not hear, on descending the staircase, the word *dungeon* pronounced? *Mordieu!* quite the contrary; when, by chance, we encounter such a man as Monsieur de Carmainges, we should talk, like the ancient Romans, of crowns and rewards. The letter is always his who carries it, duke, or his to whom it is being carried.'

D'Epernon bowed, grumbling.

'You will carry your letter, Monsieur de Carmainges.'

'But, sire, think of what it might contain,' said d'Epernon; 'do not trifle with delicacy, when it concerns the life of your Majesty.'

'You will carry your letter, monsieur de Carmainges,' repeated the King, without replying to his favourite.

'Thanks, sire,' said Carmainges, retiring.

'Where do you carry it?'

'To Madame the Duchess of Montpensier, I believe I had the honour of telling your Majesty.'

'I do not explain myself well; to what address I mean? Is it to the Hôtel de Guise, to the Hôtel Saint Denis, or to Bel——'

A look from d'Epernon stopped the King.

'I have no particular instruction from M. de Mayenne on this subject, sire; I shall carry the letter to the Hôtel

de Guise, and there I shall learn where Madame de Montpensier is.'

'Then you will put yourself in search of the duchess?'

'Yes, sire.'

'And having found her?'

'I shall deliver her my message.'

'Just so. Now, Monsieur de Carmainges,' and the King looked steadily at the young man.

'Sire.'

'Have you sworn, or promised, aught else to M. de Mayenne, than to deliver this letter into the hands of his sister?'

'No, sire.'

'You have not promised, for example,' insisted the King, 'something secret, as to the place in which you might find the duchess?'

'No, sire, I have promised nothing of the sort.'

'I shall impose upon you, then, but one condition, sir.'

'Sire, I am the slave of your Majesty.'

'You will deliver this letter to Madame de Montpensier; and, immediately the letter is delivered, you will rejoin me at Vincennes, where I shall be to-night.'

'Yes, sire.'

'And where you will render me a faithful account, where you found the duchess.'

'Sire, your Majesty may rely upon it.'

'Without other explanation or confidence, do you hear?'

'Sire, I promise it.'

'What imprudence!' said the Duke d'Epernon; 'oh, sire!'

'You have not much knowledge of men, duke; or, at least, of certain men. This one is loyal towards Mayenne, he will, therefore, be loyal to me.'

'To you, sire, I shall be more than loyal!' exclaimed Ernauton; 'I shall be devoted.'

'Now, d'Epernon,' said the King; 'no more quarrels, and you will, on the instant, pardon this brave servant for what you regarded as a want of devotedness, and for what I regard as a proof of loyalty.'

'Sire,' said Carmainges, 'M. the Duke d'Epernon is too superior a man not to have seen in the midst of my disobedience to his orders, a disobedience for which I express to him my sincere regret, how I respect and love

him; but I have, above all, done that which I regard as my duty.'

'Parfandious!' said the duke, changing his physiognomy, with the same ease that he would a mask; 'this is a trial which does you honour, my dear Carmainges, and you are really a nice youth; is it not so, Loignac? But, in the meantime, we caused him a pretty fright.'

And the duke burst into a laugh.

Loignac turned upon his heels to save him from replying; Gascon that he was, he could not lie with the same effrontery as his illustrious chief.

'It was a trial,' said the King doubtfully; 'so much the better, d'Epernon, if it were a trial; but I do not advise you to have these trials with every one, too many men would sink under them.'

'So much the better,' repeated Carmainges, in his turn; 'so much the better, Monsieur the Duke; if 'tis a trial, I am sure, in that case, of the good graces of monseigneur.'

But whilst saying these words, the young man appeared as little disposed to believe in them as the King.

'Well! now that all is ended, messieurs,' said Henry, 'let us go.'

D'Epernon bowed.

'You come with me, duke?'

'That is, I accompany your Majesty on horseback; it is the order you have given, I believe.'

'Yes. Who will attend the other door?' demanded Henry.

'A devoted servant of your Majesty,' said d'Epernon, 'M. de Sainte Maline;' and he observed the effect this name produced on Ernauton.

Ernauton remained impassible.

'Loignac,' he added, 'call M. de Sainte Maline.'

'Monsieur de Carmainges,' said the King, who perceived the intention of the Duke d'Epernon, 'you are going to execute your commission, are you not, and return immediately to Vincennes?'

'Yes, sire.'

And Ernauton, despite his philosophy, departed; happy enough at not being present at the triumph which would so much rejoice the ambitious heart of Sainte Maline.

CHAPTER XL

THE SEVEN SINS OF MADELINE

THE King had taken a glance at his horses, and seeing them so vigorous and so showy, he was unwilling to run by himself the risk of a carriage; in consequence, after having, as we have seen, acted rightly towards Ernauton, he made a sign to the duke to take a place in his coach.

Loignac and Sainte Maline took their places at the doors; a single piqueur rode in front.

The duke was seated by himself, on the front seat of the heavy machine, and the King, with all his dogs, installed himself on the cushion opposite.

Amongst all these dogs, there was one favourite, this was the one we have seen on his knee, in the lodge of the Hôtel de Ville, and which had a private cushion, upon which he gently reposed.

On the right of the King was a table, the feet of which were fixed to the floor of the coach; this table was covered with illuminated designs which His Majesty cut out with a marvellous address, despite the jolting of the coach.

They were, for the most part, sacred subjects. At the same time, as, at this period, there was, in the place of religion, a somewhat tolerant mixture of heathen ideas, the mythology was not badly represented in the religious designs of the King.

For the moment, Henry, always methodical, had made a choice amongst these designs, and occupied himself in cutting out the life of Madeline the Sinner.

The subject of itself was somewhat picturesque, and the imagination of the painter had further added to the natural disposition of the subject; we beheld Madeline, young, handsome, and fêted; sumptuous baths, balls, and pleasures figured in the collection.

The artist had the ingenious idea, as Callot had, at a later period, in his Temptation of Saint Anthony; the artist, we say, had the ingenious idea of covering the caprices of his burin, with the legitimate mantle of ecclesiastical authority; so that each design, with the running title of the seven capital sins, was explained by a particular legend.

Madeline yields to the sin of anger.

Madeline yields to the sin of gluttony.

Madeline yields to the sin of pride.

Madeline yields to the sin of luxury.

And so with the others, to the seventh and last capital sin.

The image which the King was occupied in cutting out, when they passed the Sainte Antoine gate, represented Madeline yielding to the sin of anger.

The handsome sinner, half reclining on cushions, and without other covering than the magnificent golden tresses with which she was afterwards to wash the perfumed feet of Christ; the handsome sinner, we say, had ordered to be thrown to the right, into a fish-pond, filled with lampreys, whose greedy heads were seen to rise from the water, like the muzzles of so many serpents, a slave, who had broken a precious vase; whilst on the left, she had ordered to be flogged, a woman, still less covered than herself, seeing that her hair was collected into a knot, and this had, in dressing the hair of her mistress, pulled out some of those luxurious tresses, the profusion of which should have rendered Madeline more indulgent for a fault of this kind.

The background of the picture presented some dogs, beaten, for having allowed to pass, with impunity, some poor beggars seeking charity; and cocks being slaughtered, for having crowed too loud and too early.

On arriving at the Croix-Faubin, the King had already cut out all the figures of this image, and was preparing to pass to the one entitled :—

Madeline yielding to the sin of gluttony.

This represented the pretty sinner, reclining on one of those couches of purple and gold, on which the ancients took their repasts; all that the Roman gastronomers knew of the most *recherché* viands, in fish and fruit, from dormice in wine, and mullets *au falerne*, to the Stromboli lobsters and Sicilian pomegranates, ornamented the table. On the ground, the dogs disputed for a pheasant, whilst the air was obscured with birds of a thousand colours, who carried off, from this blessed table, figs, strawberries, and cherries, which they dropped at times amongst a population of mice, which, with their noses in the air, awaited this manna which descended to them from heaven.

Madeline held in her hand, and filled with a liqueur,

fair as the topaz, one of those glasses of singular form, such as Petronius has described in the feast of Trimalcyon.

Deeply engaged in this important work, the King had contented himself with raising his eyes, on passing in front of the priory of the Jacobins, whose clock was striking vespers for the whole colony.

So that all the doors and windows of the said priory were closed so well, that one would have supposed it uninhabited, if we had not heard from the interior of the monument, the vibrations of the clock.

After this survey, the King returned industriously to his work of cutting out.

But a hundred paces beyond, an attentive observer would have seen him take a more inquisitive glance than the former, at a house of good appearance, on the left side of the road, and which, built in the midst of a beautiful garden, opened its gates on the high road.

This country house was called Bel Esbat.

Quite contrary to the convent of the Jacobins, Bel Esbat had all its windows open, with the exception of one only, before which fell a Venetian blind.

At the moment the King passed, this blind appeared almost imperceptibly to tremble.

The King exchanged glances and a smile with the duke, and prepared to attack another capital sin.

This latter was the sin of luxury.

The artist had represented it in such frightful colours, he had stigmatised the sin with such courage and fidelity, that we can only cite a part, and this part is but an episode.

The guardian angel of Madeline was flying away, terrified, to heaven, hiding his face in his two hands.

This scene, full of minute details, so absorbed the attention of the King, that he continued at his work, without noticing a certain vanity which strutted itself at the left door of his carriage.

This was a great pity, for Sainte Maline was very happy, and very proud, on his horse.

He, so near the King, he, a youngster of Gascony, within reach of hearing His Majesty the most Christian King, when he said to his dog :—

‘Very fine ! Master Love, you beset me !’

Or to M. the Duke d’Epernon, colonel-general of the infantry of the kingdom :—

'Duke, these horses, I think, will break my neck.'

From time to time, however, as if pride were to have a fall, Sainte Maline regarded, at the other door, Loignac, whom the habit of honours had rendered insensible to the honours themselves; and, finding that this gentleman was handsomer, with his calm mien and military and modest appearance, than he was, with all his swaggering airs, Sainte Maline essayed to moderate himself, but presently, certain ideas restored to his vanity his savage joy.

'They see me, they look at me,' he said; 'and they inquire, who is that happy gentleman who accompanies the King?'

At the pace they were going, and which did not justify the apprehensions of the King, the happiness of Sainte Maline would continue some time; for the horses of Elizabeth, loaded with the weighty harness all covered with silver and fringe, imprisoned in traces like those of David's, did not advance rapidly in the direction of Vincennes.

But as he prided himself too much, something like a warning from above came to allay his joy, something sorrowful, above everything, for him; he heard the King pronounce the name of Ernauton.

Twice or three times, in as many minutes, the King pronounced this name.

Upon each occasion, Sainte Maline stooped down, to catch, on the wing, this interesting enigma.

But like all things really interesting, the enigma remained interrupted by an incident or a noise.

The King uttered some exclamation, which was drawn from him, from the vexation of having given to a certain spot in his image, an unlucky cut with the scissors; or else, by an injunction to be silent, addressed with all possible tenderness, to Master Love, who yelped with the visible, but exaggerated pretension, to make as much noise as a dog.

The fact is, that from Paris to Vincennes, the name of Ernauton was pronounced at least six times by the King, and at least four by the duke, without Saint Maline being enabled to comprehend to what these ten repetitions could refer.

He imagined (as we always like to deceive ourselves) that it concerned, on the part of the King, the inquiring

as to the cause of the disappearance of the young man; and, on the part of d'Epéron, to narrate this cause, whether assumed or real.

At length they arrived at Vincennes.

There still remained three sins for the King to cut out. So that, under the specious pretext of giving himself up to this grave occupation, His Majesty, scarcely descended from his coach, shut himself up in his chamber.

The breeze that whistled out of doors, was the coldest possible; and Sainte Maline commenced settling himself near the large chimney, where he reckoned upon warming himself, and upon sleeping whilst so doing, when Loignac placed his hand upon his shoulder.

'You are a slave to-day,' he said to him, in that brief tone which only belongs to the man, who, having long obeyed, knows in his turn how to be obeyed; 'you shall sleep, therefore, some other night, so stand up, Monsieur de Sainte Maline.'

'I will watch for a fortnight at a stretch, if necessary, sir,' replied the other.

'I am sorry I have no one at hand,' said Loignac; pretending to look about him.

'Sir,' interrupted Sainte Maline, 'it is unnecessary for you to seek another; if requisite, I will not sleep for a month.'

'Oh! we shall not be so exacting as that; tranquillise yourself.'

'What is there to be done, sir?'

'Remount your horse, and return to Paris.'

'I am ready; my horse is still saddled in his box.'

'Very well. You will go straight to the lodging of the Forty-Five.'

'Yes, sir.'

'There you will wake them all, but in such a way, that except the three chiefs, whom I shall name to you, not one may know where he is going, nor what he is to do.'

'I will punctually obey these first instructions.'

'Here are the others: you will leave fourteen of these messieurs at the Saint Antoine gate; fifteen others half-way; and the remaining fourteen you will bring here.'

'Look upon this as done, Monsieur de Loignac; but at what hour must we leave Paris?'

'At dusk.'

'On foot, or on horseback ?'

'On horseback.'

'What arms ?'

'All; dagger, sword, and pistols.'

'Cuirasses ?'

'Cuirasses.'

'The rest of the orders, sir ?'

'Here are three letters : one for M. de Chalabre, one for M. de Brian, and one for yourself. M. de Chalabre will command the first squadron, M. de Brian the second, you the third.'

'Good, sir !'

'You will not open these letters till on the ground; when six o'clock strikes, M. de Chalabre, will open his at the Saint Antoine gate—M. de Brian, at the Croix-Faubin—you, at the gate of the Donjon.'

'Must we come with speed ?'

'With all the speed of your horses, without raising any suspicion, however, or making yourselves remarked. In order to leave Paris, each will take a different gate; M. de Chalabre, the Bourdelle gate—M. de Brian, the gate of the Temple—you, who have the longest road, will take the direct route, that is, the gate of Saint Antoine.'

'Good, sir !'

'The further instructions are in these three letters. Now go.'

Sainte Maline bowed, and made a movement as if going.

'By the way,' said Loignac, 'from hence to the Croix-Faubin, go as fast as you like, but from the Croix-Faubin to the barrier, go slowly; you have yet two hours before dark, it is more time than you require.'

'Exactly so, sir.'

'Have you well understood, and do you wish me to repeat the order ?'

'It is unnecessary, sir.'

'A good journey, Monsieur de Sainte Maline !' And Loignac, trailing his spurs after him, re-entered the apartments.

'Fourteen in the first troop, fifteen in the second, and fifteen in the third, it is evident they do not reckon upon Ernauton, and that he no longer makes part of the Forty-Five.'

Sainte Maline, puffed up with pride, executed his commission like an important, but punctual man.

Half an hour after his departure from Vincennes, and all the instructions of Loignac followed to the letter, he cleared the barrier. In another quarter of an hour he was at the lodging of the Forty-Five.

The majority of these gentlemen were already relishing, in their rooms, the odour of supper, which was smoking in the respective kitchens of their housekeepers.

Thus the noble Lardille de Chaventrade had prepared a dish of mutton and carrots, with forced meat, that is, in the fashion of Gascony, a succulent dish; to which, on his side, Militor was paying some attentions, that is, beating with an iron fork, by the aid of which he experimented on the degree of perfection to which, in the way of cooking, the meats and vegetables had arrived.

Thus Pertinax de Montcrabeau, with the aid of that singular domestic whom he no longer *thee'd*, but who *thee'd* his master instead; Pertinax de Montcrabeau, we say, exercised for a squadron, who shared the expenses, his own culinary talents. The *club*, founded by this skilful administrator, united eight associates, who each paid six sols for the repast.

M. de Chalabre never ostensibly ate; he was looked upon as a creation of mythology, placed by nature beyond any want.

What made his divine nature double, was his meagreness.

He regarded his companions breakfast, dine, and sup, like a proud cat who will not beg, but who is still hungry, and who, to appease his hunger, licks his moustaches. It is just, however, to observe, that when they offered him, and it was seldom they offered, he refused; having, he said, the last morsels in his mouth, and the last morsels were never less than partridges, pheasants, cartarellas, larks, woodcock pies, and scarce fish.

The whole had been habitually washed down with a profusion of Spanish and other wines, of the best vintages, such as Malaga, Cyprus, and Syracuse.

The whole of this society, as we see, disposed at their pleasure of the cash of His Majesty Henry the Third.

For the rest, we might judge of the character of each from the aspect of his little lodging. Some loved flowers,

and cultivated, in a broken jug, some consumptive rose-tree or jaundiced creeping-plant; others had, like the King, a taste for designs, without his ability to cut them out; others, lastly, had, as veritable nuns, introduced to their lodge the governess or the niece.

M. d'Epéron had said quietly to Loignac, that the Forty-Five, not inhabiting the interior of the Louvre, he might shut his eyes upon this point; and Loignac closed his eyes.

Nevertheless, when the trumpet sounded, all this world became the soldier and slave of a vigorous discipline, mounted their horses, and held themselves in readiness.

At eight in the winter, they retired to bed; at ten, in the summer; but fifteen only slept, fifteen others slept with one eye open, and the others slept not at all.

As it was only half-past five in the evening, Sainte Maline found all his men astir, and in the most gastronomical dispositions possible.

But with a single word, he cleared away all these dishes. 'To horse, messieurs,' he said.

And leaving the whole community of martyrs to the confusion of this manœuvre, he explained the orders to MM. de Brian and de Chalabre.

Some, while buckling on their girdles, and fastening their cuirasses, swallowed a few mouthfuls, moistened by a large cup of wine; others, whose supper was less advanced, armed themselves with resignation.

M. de Chalabre alone, on tightening the belt of his sword with the tongue of a buckle, pretended to have supped more than an hour since.

The roll was called.

Forty-four only answered, including Sainte Maline.

'M. Ernauton de Carmainges is missing,' said M. de Chalabre, whose turn it was to exercise the functions of corporal.

A profound joy filled the heart of Sainte Maline, and flowed to his very lips, which grimaced a smile; a rare thing with this man, of a sombre and curious temperament.

In fact, in the eyes of Sainte Maline, Ernauton irretrievably ruined himself, by this absence without cause, at the moment of an expedition of this importance.

The Forty-Five, or rather the forty-four, departed then, each squadron by the appointed road; namely, M. de Chalabre, with thirteen men, by the Bourdelle gate.

M. de Brian, with fourteen, by the gate of the Temple.

And lastly, M. de Sainte Maline, with fourteen others, by the Saint Antoine gate.

CHAPTER XLI

BEL ESBAT

It is scarcely necessary to observe that Ernauton, whom Sainte Maline believed so utterly ruined, followed on the contrary the unexpected course of his rising fortune.

He had at first very naturally calculated that the Duchess of Montpensier, whom he was deputed to find, would be at the Hôtel de Guise, from the moment she arrived in Paris.

Ernauton therefore directed his steps to the Hôtel de Guise.

When, after knocking at the large door, which was opened to him with extreme caution, he demanded the honour of an interview with Madame the Duchess of Montpensier, he was at first cruelly laughed at.

But, as he insisted, he was told he ought to know that her highness lived at Soissons and not at Paris.

Ernauton expected this reply : it did not disturb him, therefore.

'I am sorry for this absence,' he said; 'I had a communication of the highest importance to make to her highness, on the part of M. the Duke de Mayenne.'

'On the part of the Duke de Mayenne !' said the porter; 'and who then has charged you with this communication ?'

'M. de Mayenne himself.'

'Charged ! he, the duke !' exclaimed the porter, with an astonishment admirably feigned; 'and where did he charge you with this communication ? M. the Duke is no more in Paris than Madame the Duchess !'

'I am well aware of it,' replied Ernauton; 'but I also might not have been in Paris; I also might have encountered M. the Duke elsewhere than at Paris : on the road to Blois, for example.'

'On the road to Blois ?' said the porter, a little attentive.

'Yes, and on this road he might have encountered me, and charged me with a message for Madame the Duchess.'

A slight alarm appeared on the countenance of the questioner, who, as if afraid his consigné would be invaded, kept the door half opened.

'Then,' he demanded, 'where is the message?'

'I have it.'

'About you?'

'Here,' said Ernauton, striking his bosom.

The faithful servant fixed upon Ernauton a scrutinising look.

'You say you have this message about you?' he said.

'Yes, sir.'

'And that this message is important?'

'Of the highest importance.'

'Will you allow me simply to look at it?'

'Willingly.'

And Ernauton drew from his bosom the letter of M. de Mayenne.

'Oh! oh! what extraordinary ink!' said the porter.

'Tis blood,' coolly replied Ernauton.

The servant turned pale at these words, and more so, no doubt, at the idea that this blood might be the blood of M. de Mayenne.

In those times, there was a dearth of ink, but a great abundance of blood shed; and the result was, that lovers frequently wrote to their mistresses, and parents to their families, with the liquid in most abundance.

'Sir,' said the attendant, in great haste, 'I know not whether you will find in Paris, or the environs of Paris, Madame the Duchess of Montpensier; but at all events, will you have the goodness to repair without delay to a house in the Faubourg Saint Antoine, which they call Bel Esbat, and which belongs to Madame the Duchess. You will recognise it, seeing that 'tis the first on the left hand going to Vincennes, after the convent of the Jacobins; most certainly you will find there some person in the service of Madame the Duchess, sufficiently in her confidence to be enabled to inform you where Madame the Duchess is at this moment.'

'Very well,' said Ernauton, who conceived that the attendant would not, or could not say more; 'thank you.'

'In the Faubourg Saint Antoine,' repeated the servant, 'every one knows, and will point out Bel Esbat, although

they are ignorant that it belongs to Madame de Montpensier; Madame de Montpensier having purchased this house only a short time since, and to serve her as a retreat.'

Ernauton made a sign with his head, and turned himself towards the Faubourg Saint Antoine.

He had no difficulty in finding the house Bel Esbat, contiguous to the priory of the Jacobins.

He pulled a bell; the door opened.

'Enter,' said some one.

He entered, and the door closed behind him.

Once introduced, they seemed to expect him to say something; but as he contented himself with looking round him, they inquired of him what he wanted ?

'I wish to speak to Madame the Duchess,' said the young man.

'And why are you come to Bel Esbat, to see Madame the Duchess ?' demanded the valet.

'Because,' replied Ernauton, 'the porter at the Hôtel de Guise sent me here.'

'Madame the Duchess is no more at Bel Esbat than at Paris,' replied the valet.

'In that case,' said Ernauton, 'I shall defer to a more propitious moment, acquitting myself towards her of the commission with which M. the Duke de Mayenne has charged me.'

'For her, for Madame the Duchess ?'

'For Madame the Duchess.'

'A commission from M. the Duke de Mayenne ?'

'Yes.'

The valet reflected a moment.

'Sir,' he said, 'I cannot take upon myself to reply to you; but I have here a superior whom it is necessary I should consult; will you wait ?'

'They are well served here, mordieu !' said Ernauton; 'what order, what consigné, what exactitude ! certainly these men must be very dangerous, if they find it necessary to be thus guarded. They do not enter the hotel of the MM. Guise, as they do at the Louvre, I must confess; so I shall begin to think that it is not the real King of France I serve.'

And he looked round him; the court was deserted, but all the doors of the stables open, as though they expected some troop who had but to enter and take up their quarters.

Ernauton was interrupted in his examination by the valet who entered; he was followed by another valet.

'Confide your horse to me, sir,' he said, 'and follow my comrade; you will find some one who can reply to you much better than I can.'

Ernauton followed the valet, waited an instant in a sort of antechamber, and shortly afterwards, upon the order which the attendant had received, was introduced into a small room adjoining, in which was at work, embroidering, a woman dressed without pretension, though with a sort of elegance.

She turned her back towards Ernauton.

'Here is the cavalier who presents himself on the part of M. de Mayenne, madame,' said the lackey.

She made a movement.

Ernauton uttered an exclamation of surprise.

'You, madame !' he exclaimed, on recognising at once his page and his stranger of the litter, under this third transformation.

'You !' exclaimed the lady in her turn, letting her work drop, and regarding Ernauton.

And making a sign to the lackey.

'Leave,' she said.

'You are of the house of Madame the Duchess of Montpensier, madame ?' said Ernauton with surprise.

'Yes,' said the unknown; 'but you, you, sir, how do you bring here a message from M. de Mayenne ?'

'By a concurrence of events which I could not anticipate, and which it would be too long to recount to you,' said Ernauton, with extreme caution.

'Oh ! you are discreet, sir,' continued the lady, smiling.

'Whenever it is necessary, I am so, madame.'

'Tis that I do not here see the occasion for so great discretion,' said the stranger; 'for, in fact, if you really bring a message from the person whom you say——'

Ernauton made another movement.

'Ah ! don't be angry; if you bring a message indeed from the person you mention, the matter is interesting enough to put us in mind of our liaison, ephemeral as it was; you can tell us what this message is ?'

The lady introduced into her last words all the cheerful caressing, and seductive grace that a pretty woman could put into her request.

'Madame,' replied Ernauton, 'you will not make me say what I do not know.'

'And still less what you will not say.'

'I have nothing to say, madame,' replied Ernauton, bowing.

'Do as you like respecting verbal communications, sir.'

'I have no verbal communications to make, madame; the whole of my mission consists in delivering a letter to her highness.'

'Well! this letter, then?' said the unknown lady, extending her hand.

'This letter?' said Ernauton.

'Will you be good enough to deliver it to us?'

'Madame,' said Ernauton, 'I believe I have had the honour of informing you that this letter is addressed to Madame the Duchess of Montpensier.'

'But the duchess absent, 'tis I who represent her here,' said the lady impatiently; 'you may then——'

'I cannot.'

'Do you mistrust me, sir?'

'I ought to, madame,' said the young man, with a look in the expression of which there could be no mistake; 'but despite the mystery of your conduct, you have inspired me, I confess, with other sentiments than those of which you speak.'

'Really!' exclaimed the lady, blushing a little under the passionate regard of Ernauton.

Ernauton bowed.

'Pay attention, sir messenger,' she said, smiling, 'you are making me a declaration of love.'

'Why, yes, madame,' said Ernauton; 'I know not if I shall again see you, and really the opportunity is too precious to me, to allow it to escape.'

'In that case, sir, I understand.'

'You comprehend that I love you, madame, 'tis a matter easily understood, indeed.'

'No, I comprehend how it is you are come here.'

'Ah! pardon, madame,' said Ernauton; 'in my turn, 'tis I who do not comprehend.'

'Yes, I comprehend that having a desire to see me again, you have formed a pretext for introducing yourself here.'

'I, madame, a pretext! Ah! you judge me wrongly;

I was ignorant that I should ever again see you, and I left everything to chance, which, twice already, had thrown me in your way. But to form a pretence, I, never! I am a strange being, and I do not think in all matters like the rest of the world.'

'Ah! ah! you are in love, you say, and you have scruples as to the mode of seeing the person you love? This is very fine, sir,' said the lady, with a certain mock pride; 'well, I suspected that you had scruples.'

'And why, madame, if you please?' demanded Ernauton.

'The other day, you met me; I was in a litter; you recognised me, and yet you did not follow me.'

'Take care, madame,' said Ernauton, 'you avow that you paid attention to me.'

'Ah! a pretty avowal, really! Have we not met under circumstances which permit *me*, especially, to put my head outside my carriage door, when you pass? But no; monsieur departed at a smart gallop, after uttering an "ah!" which made me shudder at the bottom of my litter.'

'I was compelled to leave, madame.'

'By your scruples?'

'No, madame, by my duty.'

'Come, come,' said the lady, smiling, 'I see that you are a reasonable and circumspect lover, and one who especially fears to compromise himself.'

'When you have inspired me with certain fears, madame,' replied Ernauton, 'is there anything astonishing in that? is it the custom, tell me, for a woman to dress herself as a man, force the barriers, and view the quartering of a wretch at the Grève, and that with forced gesticulations more than incomprehensible, say?'

The lady turned slightly pale, but concealed her paleness, if we may so speak, under a smile.

Ernauton pursued.

'Is it natural, indeed, that this lady, as soon as she has taken this strange pleasure, is afraid of being arrested, and flies like a thief; she who is in the service of Madame de Montpensier, a powerful princess, though somewhat out at court.'

The lady, this time, smiled again, but with an irony more marked.

'You have but little perspicuity, sir, despite your

pretension of being an observer,' she said; 'for, with a little sense, all that appears to you obscure, would have been explained to you at the same moment. Was it not very natural, in the first place, that Madame the Duchess of Montpensier should be interested in the fate of M. de Salcède, in what he might say, in his revelations, true or false, very likely to compromise the house of Lorraine; and if that was natural, sir, was it less so that this princess should send a person, certain, trustworthy, in whom she could place every confidence, to be present at the execution, and state, from her own knowledge, as they say at the palace, the minutest details of the affair? Well! this person was myself, sir; it was I, I the confidante of her highness. Now, let us see, do you think I could enter Paris when every barrier was closed? Do you think I could appear at the Grève in the dress of a woman? Do you think, in fact, that I could rest indifferent, now that you know my position with the princess, to the sufferings of the patient, and to his changeable revelations?'

'You are perfectly right, madame,' said Ernauton; bowing, 'and now I swear to you, I admire your spirit and your logic, as much as I did before your beauty.'

'Many thanks, sir. But now that we know each other, and matters are thus explained between us, give me the letter, since the letter exists, and is not a mere pretext.'

'Impossible, madame.'

The stranger made an effort to restrain her feelings.

'Impossible?' she repeated.

'Yes, impossible, for I have sworn to M. the Duke de Mayenne, to deliver this letter into the hands of Madame the Duchess of Montpensier herself.'

'Say, rather, sir,' exclaimed the lady, giving way to her irritation, 'say, rather, that the letter does not exist; say, that despite your pretended scruples, the letter was only a pretext for your introduction here; say that you had resolved to see me, and nothing more. Well, sir, you are satisfied; not only are you here, not only have you again seen me, but you have also told me that you adore me.'

'In that, as in all the rest, madame, I have told you the truth.'

'Well! be it so, you adore me; you wished to see me, you have seen me, I have procured you a pleasure in exchange for a service. We are quit. Adieu.'

'I shall obey you, madame,' said Ernauton, 'and since you dismiss me, I retire.'

The lady's irritation now broke out in real earnest.

'Ouidà !' she said; 'but if you know me, I know not you. Does it not seem to you that in this you have too many advantages over me ? Ah ! you think it is sufficient to enter, under some pretext, the house of some princess; for you are here in the house of Madame de Montpensier, sir; and to say—"I have succeeded in my perfidy, and I retire." Sir, this is not the action of a gallant man.'

'It appears to me, madame,' said Ernauton, 'that you qualify very harshly that which would be an act of mere kindness at the most, were it not, as I have had the honour of telling you, an affair of the greatest importance, and of the strictest truth. I shall not notice your cruel expressions, madame; and shall absolutely forget anything I may have said, whether affectionate or tender, since you are so ill-disposed towards me. But I shall not leave this under the weight of the unmerited imputations to which you have subjected me. I have, in fact, a letter from M. de Mayenne to deliver to Madame de Montpensier, and that letter is here: it is written with his hand, which you may see, from the address.'

Ernauton showed the letter to the lady, but without quitting possession of it.

The stranger glanced at it, and exclaimed,—

'His writing ! blood !'

Without making any reply, Ernauton replaced the letter in his bosom, bowed a last time with his habitual courtesy, and pale, chilled at heart, he turned towards the entrance of the apartment.

This time she ran after him, and, like Joseph, he was seized by the cloak.

'Your pleasure, madame ?' he said.

'For pity's sake, pardon,' exclaimed the lady, 'pardon, has any accident happened to the duke ?'

'Whether I pardon or not, madame, is all one,' said Ernauton; 'as to the letter, since you demand pardon from the mere purpose of reading it, and as Madame de Montpensier alone shall read it——'

'Eh ! wretched madman that you are,' exclaimed the duchess, with a majestic fury; 'do you not recognise me, or rather do you not guess me to be supreme mistress;

and do you here see sparkle the eyes of a servant? I am the Duchess de Montpensier, deliver me the letter.'

'You are the duchess!' exclaimed Ernauton, recoiling with stupefaction.

'Eh! undoubtedly. Come, come, give it; see you not that I am in haste to know what has happened to my brother?'

But instead of obeying, as the duchess expected, the young man, having recovered his first surprise, folded his arms.

'How would you have me believe your words,' he said; 'you, whose mouth has already deceived me twice?'

Her eyes, which the duchess had already invoked to the support of her words, now launched forth mortal flashes; but Ernauton bravely sustained the flame.

'You still doubt—you want proofs, when I affirm,' exclaimed the imperious dame, tearing with her pretty little nails her lace ruffles.

'Yes, madame,' coldly replied Ernauton.

The stranger rushed to a little hand-bell, which she must have tried to break, so violent was the force with which she sounded it.

The vibration resounded throughout every adjoining apartment, and before the vibration had ceased, a valet appeared.

'What does madame require?' said the valet.

The stranger stamped with rage.

'Mayneville,' she said, 'I wish to see Mayneville. Is he not here, then?'

'Yes, madame.'

'Well! let him come then!'

The valet hastened from the apartment. A minute afterwards, Mayneville entered precipitately.

'At your orders, madame,' said Mayneville.

'Madame! and since when have I been called simply madame, M. de Mayneville?' said the duchess, exasperated.

'At the orders of your highness,' said Mayneville, bowing, and surprised even to amazement.

'Tis well,' said Ernauton, 'for I have before me a gentleman, and if he tells me a falsehood, by Heaven, I shall at least know who to look to.'

'You have faith at last!' said the duchess.

‘Yes, madame, I believe; and as a proof, there is the letter.’

And the young man, bowing, handed to Madame de Montpensier, the letter so long disputed.

CHAPTER XLII

THE LETTER OF M. DE MAYENNE

THE duchess seized the letter, opened it, and read it eagerly, without even attempting to conceal the impressions, which succeeded each other, in her features, like the fleeting and driving clouds when the hurricane is master of everything.

When she had finished, she handed the letter to Mayneville, as uneasy as herself. The letter was in these words :

‘MY SISTER,—I wished, myself, to do the business of a captain, or master of arms; I have been punished.

‘I have received a smart sword-thrust from the rapsallion whom you know, and with whom I have for some time had an account. The worst of all this is, that he killed five men for me, among whom are Boularon and Desnorses, namely, two of my best; after which he fled.

‘I must say that he was greatly assisted in this victory by the bearer of this, a charming young man, as you may see. I recommend him to you; he is discretion itself.

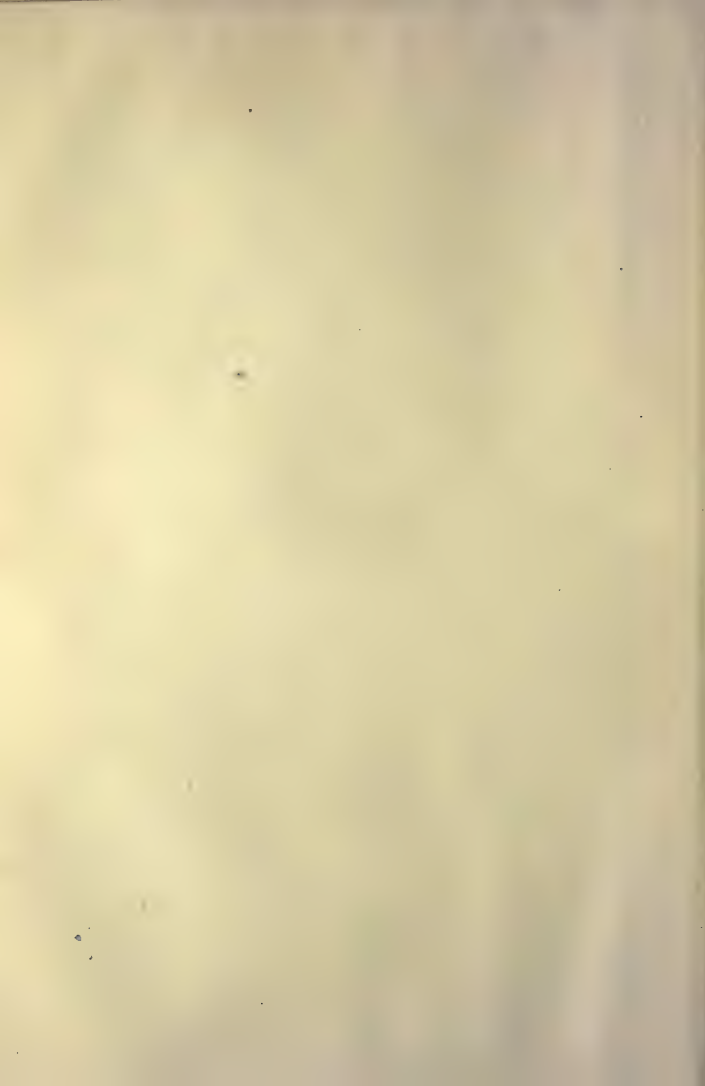
‘One merit he will obtain in your eyes, I presume, my very dear sister, is that of having prevented my vanquisher from decapitating me; the which vanquisher, had a great desire so to do, having torn off my mask, whilst I had fainted, and recognised me.

‘This cavalier is discreet, my sister, I recommend you to discover his name and profession; to me he is suspicious, though interesting. To all my offers of service, he contented himself with replying, that the master he serves allows him to want for nothing.

‘I cannot tell you more on his account, for I tell you all I know; he pretends not to know me. Observe this.

‘I suffer much, but without danger of death, I believe.





Send me my surgeon quickly; I am, like a horse, on the straw; the bearer will inform you of the place.

'Your affectionate brother,

'MAYENNE.'

The letter finished, the duchess and Mayneville regarded each other in astonishment.

The duchess first broke the silence, which had been badly interpreted by Ernauton.

'To whom,' demanded the duchess, 'are we indebted for the signal service you have rendered us, sir?'

'To a man who, upon every occasion that presents itself, madame, gives his assistance to the weakest against the strongest.'

'Will you give me some details, sir?' continued Madame de Montpensier. Ernauton narrated all he knew, and indicated the retreat of the duke. Madame de Montpensier and Mayneville listened to him with an interest easily imagined. When he had finished,—

'May I hope, sir,' said the duchess, 'that you will continue the work so well commenced, and that you will attach yourself to our house?'

These words, pronounced in that gracious tone which the duchess knew so well how to assume occasionally, implied a meaning very flattering, after the avowal which Ernauton had made to the lady of honour to the duchess; but the young man, throwing aside all self-love, reduced these words to their signification of pure curiosity.

He saw plainly, that to state his name and position, would be to open the eyes of the duchess as to the consequences of this event; he also imagined that the King, in making his little condition, as to the revealing to him the retreat of the duchess, had more in it than a simple piece of information.

Two interests struggled within him : as a man in love, he could sacrifice one; as a man of honour, he could not abandon the other.

The temptation was the greater that, by avowing his position with the King, he would gain an immense importance in the mind of the duchess; and it was no slight consideration for a young man, arriving straight from Gascony, to be considered as an important personage by the Duchess of Montpensier.

Sainte Maline would not have hesitated for a moment.

These reflections occurred to the mind of Carmaingès; but had no other influence than to give him a little more pride, and consequently a little more firmness.

It was much to be, at this moment, something; much for him, certainly, at that time; they had wellnigh taken him for a plaything.

The duchess awaited his reply to the question she had put to him: 'Are you disposed to attach yourself to our house?'

'Madame,' said Ernauton, 'I have already had the honour of informing M. de Mayenne, that my master is a good master; and, from the fashion in which he treats me, absolves me from seeking a better.'

'My brother tells me in his letter, sir, that you appeared not to recognise him. How, not having recognised him yonder, came you to use his name here, to obtain an introduction to me?'

'M. de Mayenne seemed desirous of guarding his incognito, madame; I did not think it my duty to recognise him; and there was, in fact, an inconvenience, in allowing the peasants, with whom he is lodged, to know the illustrious and wounded man on whom they have bestowed their hospitality. Here the inconvenience no longer exists; on the contrary, the name of M. de Mayenne, being a passport to an introduction to you, I made use of it; in this case, as in the other, I think I have acted as a gallant man.'

Mayneville regarded the duchess, as much as to say:—

'You see he is a clever spirit, madame.'

The duchess comprehended him exactly. She regarded Ernauton, smiling.

'No one could better escape from an inconvenient question,' she said; 'and you are, I must confess, a man of spirit.'

'I see no spirit in that which I have had the honour of telling you, madame,' replied Ernauton.

'Well, sir,' said the duchess with some impatience, 'what I see the clearest in all this is that you will say nothing.'

'Probably you do not sufficiently reflect that gratitude is a heavy burden for any one who bears my name; that I am a woman; that you have twice rendered me a service; and that I really wish to know your name or rather who you are.'

'I am aware of all this madame; I know that you will easily learn all this; but you will learn it from another than myself; and I shall have said nothing.'

'He is still right,' said the duchess, fixing upon Ernauton a regard, which, if he comprehended all its expression, must have given him more pleasure than any regard had yet done.

He therefore asked no more; but, like the gourmand who rises from the table when he thinks he has drank the best wine of the repast, Ernauton bowed, and took his leave of the duchess, upon this happy manifestation.

'This is all you have to say to me then, sir?' inquired the duchess.

'I have executed my commission,' replied the young man; 'there remains for me nothing more than to present my very humble respects to your highness.'

The duchess followed him with her eyes, without returning his salutation; and when the door was closed upon him,—

'Mayneville,' she said, stamping with her foot, 'have this youth followed.'

'Impossible, madame,' replied the latter; 'all our people are abroad; I myself am waiting the event: 'tis an evil day to do aught else than that which we have decided upon doing.'

'You are right, Mayneville; really I am mad; but another time——'

'Oh, another time, that is a different affair; as you please, madame.'

'Yes, for I suspect him, like my brother.'

'Suspect or not, madame, he's a brave lad, and brave men are scarce. We must confess that we are lucky; a stranger, an unknown, who falls to us from heaven to render us such a service.'

'Never mind, never mind, Mayneville; if we are obliged to abandon him at this moment, keep a watch on him, at least, by-and-by.'

'Eh! madame, by-and-by,' said Mayneville, 'we shall have no occasion I hope to keep a watch on any one.'

'Well, decidedly, I know not what I say to-night; you are right, Mayneville; I am losing my senses.'

'It is allowable to a general like you, madame, to be preoccupied on the eve of a decisive action.'

'Tis true. It is now dark, Mayneville; and the Valois returns from Vincennes, when night has closed in.'

'Oh! we have time before us; it is not eight o'clock, and, besides, our men are not yet arrived.'

'They have all the word, have they not?'

'All.'

'They are sure men?'

'Tried ones, madame.'

'How do they arrive?'

'Solitary, and on foot.'

'How many do you expect?'

'Fifty; it is more than sufficient. Understand, besides these fifty men, we have two hundred monks, who are worth as many soldiers, if they are not worth even more.'

'As soon as our men have arrived, have the monks ranged along the road.'

'They are already instructed, madame; they will intercept the road, ours will drive the coach towards them; the door of the convent will be opened, and we'll have nothing more to do than to close upon the coach.'

'To supper then, Mayneville, it will make us pass the time. I am so impatient that I would advance the needle of the pendulum.'

'The hour will come, be assured.'

'But our men, our men?'

'They will be here at the hour; eight o'clock has scarcely struck, there is no time lost.'

'Mayneville, Mayneville, my poor brother asks me for his surgeon; the best surgeon, the best styptic for the wound of Mayenne would be a lock from the hair of the shaven Valois; and the man who shall carry him this present, Mayneville, will be sure of a welcome.'

'In two hours, madame, this man shall depart to seek our dear duke in his retreat; leaving Paris like a runaway, he shall return to it as a conqueror.'

'One word more, Mayneville,' said the duchess, stopping at the doorway.

'What, madame?'

'Are our friends of Paris apprised?'

'What friends?'

'Our leaguers.'

'God forbid, madame. To apprise a bourgeois, is to rise the staff of Notre-Dame. The blow struck, remember that, before a soul knows anything of it, we have fifty

couriers to despatch; and then the prisoner will be in safety in the cloister; we can defend ourselves against an army. If it must be, we shall then risk nothing, and we may cry from the roofs of the convent: "The Valois is ours!"

'Come, come, you are a prudent and skilful man, Mayneville, and the Bearnais well spoke in calling you "carry the league." I reckoned upon doing a little of what you have just said; but it was confused. Do you know that my responsibility is great, Mayneville, and that never, at any time, did a woman undertake and complete a work like that of which I dream?'

'I know it well, madame, and therefore I tremble in advising you.'

'Then I resume,' continued the duchess, with authority; 'the monks armed under their robes?'

'They are so.'

'The swordsmen on the road?'

'They ought to be at this hour.'

'The bourgeois apprised after the event?'

'Tis the affair of the three couriers; in ten minutes; Lachapelle Marteau, Bugard, and Bussy Leclerc are apprised; they will apprise the others.'

'In the first place have killed those two great simpletons whom we saw pass at the sides of the coach; and so manage that we can afterwards recount the event as may be most advantageous to our interests.'

'Kill those poor devils?' said Mayneville; 'you think it is necessary they should die, madame?'

'Is Loignac any very great loss?'

'He is a brave soldier.'

'A mere fortunate man, like that other coxcomb who capered on the left of the coach, with his brazen eyes and tanned skin.'

'Ah! in his case, I have less repugnance to it, I do not know him; besides, I am of your opinion, madame; and he possesses a very vile countenance.'

'You will abandon him to me, then?' said the duchess smiling.

'Ah! with all my heart, madame.'

'Many thanks, in reality.'

'Mon Dieu! madame, I do not dispute it; what I say is always for your own renown, and for the morality of the party we represent.'

'Tis well, 'tis well, Mayneville; we know what a virtuous man you are, and we will sign you a certificate for it, if necessary. You will be nothing in this affair; they will have defended the King, and will have been killed in defending him. What I recommend to you is that young man.'

'What young man?'

'He who has just left here; see if he is really gone, and if it is not some spy who is sent us by our enemies.'

'Madame,' said Mayneville, 'I am at your orders.'

He went to the balcony, half opened the blinds, passed his head out, and attempted to distinguish about him.

'Oh! the dark night,' he said.

'Good, excellent night,' said the duchess; 'and the darker the better; so keep up your courage, my captain.'

'Yes: but we see nothing, madame; and for you, especially, it is necessary to see.'

'God, whose interests we defend, sees for us, Mayneville.'

Mayneville, who, we may at least imagine, was not so confident as Madame de Montpensier, as to the intervention of Providence in affairs of this nature, replaced himself at the window; and regarding, as far as it was possible to do, in the obscurity, remained motionless.

'Do you see any one passing?' said the duchess, extinguishing the lights from precaution.

'No, but I hear horses moving.'

'Come, come, those are ours, Mayneville. All goes well.'

And the duchess searched if she had still at her waist the famous pair of scissors, which was to play so conspicuous a part in history.

CHAPTER XLIII

HOW DOM MODESTE GORENFLOT BLESSES THE KING, ON HIS PASSAGE BEFORE THE PRIORY OF THE JACOBINS

ERNAUTON took his leave, his heart slightly wounded, but his conscience clear; he had had the singular happiness to declare his love to a princess, and, by the important conversation which immediately succeeded, to make his declaration forgotten; just enough that it might do no harm at present, but might bear fruit at another time.

This is not all, he had still been lucky enough not to bet ay the King, not to betray M. de Mayenne, and not to betray himself.

He was therefore contented, but he still desired many things, and amongst these things a prompt return to Vincennes, to inform the King.

The King informed, to go to bed and dream.

To dream is the supreme happiness of men of action; 'tis the only repose they permit themselves.

Scarcely outside the door of Bel Esbat, therefore, Ernauton put his horse in a gallop, but scarcely had he gone a hundred paces in a gallop with this companion, so well proved for so many hours, when he found himself arrested by an obstacle, which his eyes, dazzled by the light of Bel Esbat, and not yet well accustomed to the obscurity, had not been able to perceive, and could not measure.

It was quite simply a troop of cavaliers, who, from both sides of the road, closing to the middle, surrounded him, and pointed to his breast half a dozen swords, and as many pistols and daggers.

This was no joke for a single man.

'Oh! oh!' said Ernauton, 'they rob on the high road, within a league of Paris; a plague on the country. The King has a bad provost; I shall advise him to change.'

'Silence, if you please,' said a voice, which Ernauton fancied he recognised; 'your sword, your arms, and do it quickly.'

A man seized the bridle of his horse, two others deprived Ernauton of his weapons.

'Plague! what expert fellows!' murmured Ernauton.

And turning towards those who arrested him,—

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'you will at least do me the favour to inform me——'

'Eh, why! 'tis Monsieur de Carmainges,' said the principal robber, the same who had seized the sword of the young man, and still held it.

'Monsieur de Pincornay!' exclaimed Ernauton. 'Oh! fie! fie! what a villainous trade you have taken to!'

'I said silence,' repeated the voice of the chief, at some paces distant; 'let them bring the man to the depot.'

'But, Monsieur de Sainte Maline,' said Perducas de Pincornay, 'the man whom we have arrested——'

'Well?'

'Is our companion, M. Ernauton de Carmainges.'

'Ernauton here!' exclaimed Sainte Maline, turning pale with rage; 'he! what does he do here?'

'Good evening, gentlemen,' said Carmainges tranquilly; 'I did not expect, I can assure you, to find myself in such good company.'

Sainte Maline remained dumb.

'It seems you arrest me,' continued Ernauton; 'for I do not presume that you intend to plunder me.'

'The devil! the devil!' grumbled Sainte Maline; 'the event was not foreseen.'

'On my part, not a whit the more, I swear,' said Carmainges, laughing.

'Tis embarrassing; well, what are you doing on the road?'

'If I put this question to you, M. de Sainte Maline, would you answer me?'

'No.'

'Then you will consider it right, that I act as you would act.'

'And you will not say what brings you on the road?' Ernauton smiled, but made no reply.

'Nor where you are going?'

The same silence.

'Then, sir,' said Sainte Maline, 'since you will not explain yourself, I am compelled to treat you as an ordinary individual.'

'Do so, sir; I have simply to apprise you, that you will answer for what you do.'

'To M. de Loignac?'

'Higher than that.'

'To M. d'Epernon?'

'A little higher still.'

'Well! be it so, I have my orders, and I shall send you to Vincennes.'

'To Vincennes, wonderful! it was there I was going, sir.'

'I am happy, sir,' said Sainte Maline, 'that this little journey so well suits with your intentions.'

Two men, armed with pistols, took immediate possession of the prisoner, whom they conducted to two other men placed about five hundred paces from the first; the two latter did the same, and in this manner Ernauton had, as far as the very court of the donjon, the society of his companions.

In this court, Ernauton perceived fifty horsemen disarmed, who, with drooping ears and pale faces, surrounded by a hundred and fifty light horse, arrived from Nogent, and from Brie, deplored their ill fortune, and expected some villainous *dénouement* to an enterprise so well commenced.

It was our Forty-Five, who, for their entrance upon duty, had taken the whole of these men, some by ruse, others by main force; at one time by uniting ten against two or three, at another by graciously accosting those cavaliers whom they fancied redoubtable, and presenting at their breasts a pistol, when the others simply expected to meet their comrades and receive politeness.

The result was, that no combat had taken place, nor a cry uttered, and that, in an encounter of eight against twenty, a chief of the leaguers who had carried his hand to his poniard to defend himself, and opened his mouth to cry, had been gagged, almost smothered, and disarmed, by the Forty-Five, with the agility which the crew of a vessel runs a cable through the hands of a chain of men.

But such an affair would much have rejoiced Ernauton, had he known of it; but the young man saw, though he did not comprehend, that which had darkened his existence for the last ten minutes.

However, when he had observed all the prisoners with whom he was confounded,—

‘Sir,’ he said to Sainte Maline, ‘I see that you were apprised of the importance of my mission, and that, as a gallant companion, you feared my having some evil encounter, which determined you to take the trouble to have me escorted. Now, I can say it to you, you did quite right; the King is waiting for me, and I have important things to tell him. I will add even, that, as without you I should not probably have arrived, I shall have the honour of saying to the King what you have done for the good of the service.’

Sainte Maline reddened as much as he had before paled; but he comprehended, like a man of spirit as he was when no passion blinded him, that Ernauton spoke the truth, and that he was expected. There was no jesting with MM. d’Epernon and Loignac; he contented himself with replying therefore :—

‘You are free, Monsieur Ernauton; enchanted at having had it in my power to be agreeable to you.’

Ernauton hastily left the ranks, and mounted the steps which led to the chamber of the King.

Sainte Maline followed him with his eyes, and, half way up the staircase he could see Loignac, who welcomed M. de Carmainges, and made him a sign to continue his route.

Loignac then descended; and proceeded to the disarmament of the prizes.

He did so, and it was Loignac who verified the fact, that the route, now free, owing to the arrest of the fifty men, would remain so till the next morning; as the hour at which these fifty men were to assemble at Bel Esbat was passed.

There was, consequently, no longer danger for the King to return to Paris.

Loignac reckoned without the convent of the Jacobins, and without the artillery and musketry of the good brothers. Of this, however, d'Epéron had been perfectly instructed by Nicholas Poulain.

So, when Loignac went to his chief to say, 'Sir, the roads are free,' d'Epéron replied to him :—

'Very well. The King's orders are, that the Forty-Five make three divisions, one in front, and one at each side of the carriage; and that each troop keep close enough to prevent any fire, if fire there should chance to be, from reaching the carriage.'

'Very well,' replied Loignac, with the impassibility of the soldier; 'but as to any firing, as I do not see any muskets, I do not anticipate any mousquetades.'

'At the Jacobins, sir, you will let the ranks close,' said d'Epéron.

This dialogue was interrupted by the movement which was taking place on the staircase.

It was the King descending, prepared to start; he was followed by some gentlemen, among whom, with an oppression about the heart easy to be imagined, Sainte Maline recognised Ernauton.

'Gentlemen,' said the King, 'are my brave Forty-Five assembled ?'

'Yes, sire,' said d'Epéron, pointing out to him a group of cavaliers collected under the archway.

'The orders have been given ?'

'And will be followed, sire.'

'Then let us go,' said His Majesty.

Loignac gave the command for mounting.

The call was made in a low tone, and the Forty-Five were found assembled, not one was missing.

To the light horse was confided the care of imprisoning the men belonging to Mayneville and the duchess, with a prohibition, under punishment of death, to address them a single word.

The King mounted his carriage, and placed his naked sword by his side.

M. d'Épernon swore 'Parfandious !' and gallantly tried if his own would jump freely from the scabbard.

Nine o'clock sounded from the donjon; they started.

About an hour after the departure of Ernauton, M. de Mayneville was still at the window, from whence we have seen him endeavouring, but in vain, to follow the course of the young man in the darkness; but this hour having elapsed, he was much less tranquil, and especially a little less inclined to believe in the assistance of Providence, for he began to suspect that the assistance of man had failed him.

Not one of his soldiers had appeared; the road, silent and dark, returned no sound except at distant intervals, when the swift pace of some speedy horsemen might have been heard hastening to Vincennes.

At this noise, M. de Mayneville and the duchess attempted to plunge their eyes into the obscurity, to recognise their man, to guess something of what was passing, or to ascertain the cause of their delay.

But, these sounds extinguished, all was again silent.

This perpetual going and coming, without any result, had terminated by inspiring Mayneville with such inquietude, that he had made one of the duchess's men mount a horse, with orders to get information from the first troop of cavaliers he might encounter.

The messenger had not returned.

Finding this, the impatient duchess sent a second, who likewise had not returned.

'Our officer, then,' said the duchess, still disposed to look on the best side of things, 'our officer is afraid of not having men enough, and he retains, as a reinforcement, those we have sent him; 'tis prudent, but annoying.'

'Annoying, yes, very annoying,' replied Mayneville, whose eyes did not quit the distant and sombre horizon.

'Mayneville, what can have happened ?'

'I will mount on horseback myself, and we shall know, madame.' And Mayneville made a movement to go.

'I forbid you,' exclaimed the duchess, restraining him; 'Mayneville, who will remain with me, then? who will know our officers, our friends, when the moment is come? No, no, remain Mayneville; we create apprehensions which are very natural when it concerns a secret of importance; but, in reality, the project was too well arranged, and especially kept too secret, not to succeed.'

'Nine o'clock,' said Mayneville, replying to his own impatience, rather than to the words of the duchess; 'ah! there are the Jacobins, who are leaving their convent, and ranging themselves along the walls of the court; perhaps they have some private information.'

'Silence!' exclaimed the duchess, stretching her hand towards the horizon.

'What?'

'Silence, listen!'

They heard, at a distance, a rolling like that of thunder.

'Tis the cavalry,' exclaimed the duchess; 'they bring him to us, they bring him to us.'

And passing, in accordance with her hasty character, from the most cruel apprehension, to the maddest joy, she clapped her hands, crying, 'I have him! I have him!'

Mayneville was still listening.

'Yes,' he said, 'yes, 'tis a coach that rolls, and horses that gallop.'

And he commanded aloud:—

'From the walls, brothers, from the walls.'

Immediately, the large gate of the priory opened precipitately, and, in good order, marched out the hundred monks, armed, at the head of whom was Borromée.

They took up a position across the road. The voice of Gorenflot was then heard, saying:—

'Wait for me! wait for me! it is important that I should be at the head of the chapter to receive His Majesty worthily.'

'To the balcony, Lord Prior! to the balcony!' exclaimed Borromée; 'you know well that you ought to overlook all. The Scripture says: "You shall rule as the cedar overlooks the hyssop."'

'True,' said Gorenflot, 'true; I had forgotten that I had chosen this post; luckily you are there to remind me of it, brother Borromée, luckily.'

Borromée gave an order in a low tone, and four brothers, under pretence of honour and ceremony, flanked the worthy prior to the balcony.

Presently the road, which made an elbow at a short distance from the priory, was illuminated by a quantity of torches, thanks to which the duchess and Mayneville could see the cuirasses shine, and the swords sparkle.

Incapable of moderating herself, she cried :—

‘Come down, Mayneville, and you shall bring him to me bound and escorted by the guards.’

‘Yes, yes, madame,’ said the gentleman, preoccupied, ‘but one thing disturbs me.’

‘Which ?’

‘I do not hear the signal agreed upon.’

‘What use is the signal, when they have him ?’

‘But they ought not to arrest until here, opposite the priory, it seems to me,’ insisted Mayneville.

‘They found a better opportunity farther on.’

‘I do not see our officer.’

‘But I do see him,’

‘Where ?’

‘That red feather.’

‘Ventre bleu ! madame !’

‘What ?’

‘That red plume !’

‘Well ?’

‘Is M. d’Epernon ! M. d’Epernon with sword in hand.’

‘Who has left him his sword ?’

‘By Heaven ! he commands.’

‘Our men ! There is treason, then ?’

‘Eh ! madame, they are not our men.’

‘You are mad, Mayneville.’

At this moment Loignac, at the head of the first troop of the Forty-Five, and brandishing a large sword, shouted, ‘Long live the King !’

‘Long live the King !’ responded, in their formidable Gascon accent, the Forty-Five.

The duchess turned pale and fell on the ledge of the window, as if fainting.

Mayneville, gloomy and resolute, seized his sword. He was not certain, that the men on passing, would not invade his house.

The cortège still advanced, like a stream of noise and light. It had reached Bel Esbat; it reached the priory.

Borromée made three steps in advance. Loignac pushed his horse straight at the monk, who appeared under his woollen robe to offer him combat.

But Borromée, like a man of quick perception, saw that all was lost, and instantly took his part.

'Place ! place !' cried Loignac roughly, 'place for the King !'

Borromée, who had drawn his sword from beneath his robe, again placed it there.

Gorenflot, electrified by the cries, and the noise of weapons, dazzled by the blazing of the torches, extended his powerful right hand, and the fore and middle fingers extended, blessed the King from the height of his balcony.

Henry, who leant towards the door, saw him, and bowed to him, smiling.

This smile, an authentic proof of the favour which the worthy prior of the Jacobins enjoyed at court, electrified Gorenflot, who sung out, in his turn, a 'Vive le roi !' with lungs capable of raising the arches of a cathedral.

But the rest of the convent remained silent. In fact, he expected quite another solution to these two months of manœuvres, and taking to arms, which had been the consequence of it.

But Borromée, like an old trooper as he was, had by a glance calculated the number of defenders of the King, and acknowledged their warlike appearance. The absence of the partisans of the duchess, revealed to him the fatal issue of the enterprise; to hesitate to submit was to ruin everything.

He did not hesitate, and at the moment the breast of the horse brushed against him, he cried : 'Vive le roi !' with a voice almost as sonorous as that of Gorenflot.

The whole of the convent then cried out, 'Vive le roi !' brandishing their weapons.

'Thanks, reverend fathers, thanks !' cried the student voice of Henry the Third.

He then passed before the convent, which was to be the end of his course, like a whirlwind of fire, noise, and glory, leaving behind Bel Esbat in the obscurity.

From her balcony, concealed by the gilded escutcheon, behind which she had fallen upon her knees, the duchess saw, interrogated, devoured, every countenance upon whom the torches threw their flaming light.

'Ah !' she said, with an exclamation, pointing out

one of the cavaliers of the escort 'look! look! Mayneville!'

'The young man, the messenger of M. the Duke de Mayenne in the service of the King,' exclaimed the latter.

'We are lost!' murmured the duchess.

'We must fly, and promptly, madame,' said Mayneville; 'conqueror to-day, the Valois will abuse his victory to-morrow.'

'We have been betrayed!' exclaimed the duchess; 'this young man has betrayed us. He knew all.'

The King was already at a distance; he had disappeared, with the whole of his escort, under the Saint Antoine gate, which opened to him, and then closed behind him.

CHAPTER XLIV

HOW CHICOT BLESSES KING LOUIS THE ELEVENTH FOR
HAVING INVENTED THE POST, AND RESOLVES TO
PROFIT BY THIS INVENTION

CHICOT, to whom our readers will permit us to return, after the important discovery he had made in unloosing the cords of M. de Mayenne's mask, had not an instant to lose, in hastening, as quickly as possible, beyond all sound of the adventure.

Between the duke and himself, from henceforth, we may well surmise, the combat would be a deadly one. Wounded in the flesh, less grievously than in his pride, Mayenne, who, to the former blows of the scabbard, now added the recent thrust with the blade, would never pardon him.

'Well! well!' exclaimed the brave Gascon, hastening his journey towards Beaugency, 'now or never is the occasion to spend upon post horses the money collected from those three illustrious personages, whom they call, Henri de Valois, Dom Modeste Gorenflot, and Sebastian Chicot.'

Skilful as he was in mimicking, not only every sentiment, but also every condition, Chicot instantly assumed the manners of a grand seigneur, as he had taken, in less precarious circumstances, the manners of a bourgeois; so that a prince was never served with greater zeal than

Maître Chicot, when he had sold the horse of Ernauton, and conversed for a quarter of an hour with the post-master.

Chicot, once in the saddle, had resolved not to pull up, until he judged himself in a place of safety; he galloped, therefore, as fast as the horses of thirty relays would kindly permit him. As for himself, he seemed formed of iron, not appearing, at the end of sixty leagues, completed in twenty hours, to feel the least fatigue.

When, thanks to this rapidity, he had, in three days, reached Bourdeaux, Chicot fancied he might allow himself to take a little breath.

We can think while we gallop; it is nearly all we can do : Chicot then thought.

His embassy, which increased in importance as he advanced towards the end of his journey, appeared to him in very different colours, without our being enabled to say precisely under what colour it did appear.

What prince was he about to find in this strange Henry, whom one party thought a fool, another a coward, and all, a despicable renegade ?

But Chicot's opinion was not that of all the world. Since his stay at Navarre, the character of Henry, like the chameleon's skin, which receives the reflection of the object upon which he rests, the character of Henry, touching his native soil, had received some shades.

Henry had, indeed, known how to place sufficient space between the royal gripe and his precious skin, which he had so skilfully saved from all gaps, not to distrust attacks.

His outward policy, however, was always the same; he was stifled in the general hubbub, and stifled with him, and around him, some illustrious names, which, in the French world, they were astonished to see reflect their light on a pale crown of Navarre. As at Paris, he paid assiduous court to his wife, whose influence, at two hundred leagues from Paris, seemed, however, to have become useless. To be brief, he vegetated, happy in living.

For the vulgar, he was a subject of hyperbolical rallery.

For Chicot, he was matter for deep meditation.

Chicot, little as he appeared to be, had a natural talent for guessing, in others, the secret under the envelope. Henry of Navarre, to Chicot, was not yet an enigma resolved, but he was an enigma.

To know that Henry of Navarre was an enigma, and not a pure and simple fact, was still much to know. Chicot, then, knew more than all the rest, in knowing, like the old sage of Greece, that he knew nothing at all.

There, where every one advanced with a high head, the speech free, the heart on the lips, Chicot felt that he must appear with the heart oppressed, the speech composed, the face masked like that of an actor.

This necessity of dissimulation was inspired in him, at first, by his natural penetration; and afterwards, by the places through which he journeyed.

Once within the limit of the little principality of Navarre, a country whose poverty was proverbial in France, Chicot, to his great astonishment, ceased observing on every countenance, in every house, in each stone, the truth of that hideous misery, which made to blush the finer province of that superb France which he had just quitted.

The woodcutter who passed, his arm resting on the yoke of his favourite beast; the damsel, with the short petticoat and nimble step, who carried water on her head, after the fashion of the ancient chaphores; the viellard, who sang some song of his youth, and shaking his venerable white head; the familiar bird that chattered in his cage, whilst pecking at his well-filled crib; the swarthy infant, with its thin but nervous limbs; all spoke to Chicot, a living, clear, and intelligible language; all cried out to him, at every step he made in advance: 'See! we are happy here!'

At times, at the sound of wheels creaking in the hollow roads, Chicot felt some sudden alarm. He remembered the heavy artilleries which broke up the roads of France. But at the turn of the road, the wagon of the vine-dresser came in sight, loaded with well-filled casks and rosy children. When, at a distance, the barrel of an arquebus made him open his eyes, behind a hedge of figs or vines, Chicot thought of the three ambuscades he had so luckily escaped from. It was nothing, however, but a sportsman, followed by his large dogs, crossing the plain abounding in hares, to reach the mountain abounding in red partridge and woodcock.

Although the season was advanced, and Chicot had left Paris filled with fog and hoar frost, it was fine, and even warm. The majestic trees, which had not yet lost

their leaves, which in the south they never entirely lose; the majestic trees, shed, from the tops of their reddening domes, a blue shadow over a grayish ground. The horizons, sharp, clear, and cloudless, were mirrored in the rays of the sun, variegated with villages and their white houses.

The Bearnais peasant, with his loose cap saucily inclined over one ear, spurred, in the plains, his little horses, who bound, without fatigue, on their iron legs; perform twenty leagues in a stage, and, never dressed, never clothed, shake themselves at their journey's end, and seek, in the first tuft of broom or heath, their only, but sufficing repast.

'Ventre de biche !' said Chicot, 'I have never seen Gascony so rich ! the Bearnais lives like a fighting cock.

'Since he is so happy, there is every reason to believe, as says his brother the King of France, that he is good; but he will not avow it perhaps. In truth, although translated into Latin, the letter still annoys me; I have almost a mind to re-translate it into Greek.

'But, bah ! I have never heard it said that Henricot, as his brother, Charles the Ninth called him, knew Latin. I will make him a French translation from my Latin one; expurgata, as they say, à la Sorbonne.'

And Chicot, whilst making these reflections to himself, obtained information as to the present locality of the King.

The King was at Nerac. It was at first supposed he was at Pau, which had induced our messenger to push on to Mont-de-Marsan; but, arrived there, the topography of the court had been rectified; and Chicot turned to the left, to gain the road to Nerac, which he found full of people, returning from the market at Condom.

They informed him—Chicot, we may remember, very circumspect when it concerned replying to the questions of others, was a very strong questioner—they informed him, we say, that the King of Navarre led a very happy life; and that he allowed himself no repose, in his perpetual transitions from one amour to another.

Chicot had made, on his road, the happy encounter of a young Catholic priest, a sheep merchant, and of an officer, who kept him good company from Mont-de-Marsan, and discoursed together with much bombast wherever they stopped.

These people appeared to him, by this very chance association, to represent wonderfully, enlightened, commercial, and military Navarre. The clerk recited to him the sonnets that were made on the amours of the King and the handsome Fosseuse, daughter of René Montmorency, Baron de Fosseux.

'Come, come,' said Chicot, 'we must, however, understand each other; they believe at Paris, that His Majesty the King of Navarre is mad after Mademoiselle de Rebours.'

'Oh !' said the officer, 'that was at Pau.'

'Yes, yes,' added the clerk, 'that was at Pau.'

'Ah ! that was at Pau,' said the merchant, who, in his quality of a plain bourgeois appeared the least informed of the three.

'How ?' said Chicot, 'the King has a mistress in every town, then ?'

'Why, that may well be,' replied the officer, 'for, to my knowledge, he was the lover of Mademoiselle Dagelle when I was in garrison at Castelnaudary.'

'Stay, stay, then,' said Chicot, 'Mademoiselle Dagelle, a Greek ?'

'Yes,' said the clerk, 'a Cypriote.'

'Pardon, pardon,' said the merchant, delighted at having his word, 'but I am from Agen !'

'Well ?'

'Well ! I can answer for it, that the King knew Mademoiselle de Tignouville, at Agen.'

'Ventre de biche !' said Chicot, 'what a gay Lothario ! But to return to Mademoiselle Dagelle, whose family I knew ?'

'Mademoiselle was jealous, and threatened without cessation; she had a pretty little rounded poniard, which she placed on her work-table; and one day the King left, carrying away the poniard, saying that he did not wish any accident to happen to the one who might succeed him.'

'So that to this day His Majesty is entirely devoted to Mademoiselle de Rebours ?' demanded Chicot.

'On the contrary, on the contrary,' said the clerk, 'they are embroiled; Mademoiselle de Rebours was daughter of the president, and, as such, a little too strong in her law proceedings. She pleaded so much against the Queen, thanks to the insinuations of the Queen-Mother,

that the poor girl became ill from it. Queen Margaret, then, who is no fool, took advantage of it, and prevailed on the King to quit Pau for Nerac, in consequence of which, the amour was nipped in its bud.'

'Then the passion of the King is for La Fosseuse ?' said Chicot.

'Oh ! mon Dieu ! yes, the more so as she is *enceinte*; 'tis a frenzy.'

'But what says the Queen ?' inquired Chicot.

'The Queen ?' repeated the officer.

'Yes, the Queen.'

'The Queen carries her griefs to the foot of the cross,' said the priest.

'Besides,' add d the officer, 'the Queen was ignorant of these affairs.'

'Good !' said Chicot; 'the thing is not possible.'

'Why so ?' said the officer.

'Because Nerac is not so large a town, but that one can see in a sort of transparent fashion.'

'Oh ! as to that, sir,' said the clerk, 'there is a park there, and, in this park, alleys of more than three thousand paces, all planted with cypress, plane-trees, and magnificent sycamores; 'tis a shady grove, in which you cannot see ten paces in full day; only think what it must be at night.'

'And then, the Queen is very much occupied, sir,' said the clerk.

'Bah ! occupied ?'

'Yes.'

'And what with, if you please ?'

'With God, sir,' replied the priest, with disdainfulness.

'With God !' exclaimed Chicot.

'Why not ?'

'Ah ! the Queen is devout ?'

'Very devout.'

'Nevertheless, there is no mass in the palace, as I imagine ?' said Chicot.

'And you imagine very wrong, sir; no mass ! do you take us for heathens, then ? Know, sir, that if the King goes to church with his gentlemen, the Queen has mass performed in a private chapel.'

'The Queen ?'

'Yes, yes.'

'Queen Margaret ?'

Queen Margaret; as a proof of which, I, an unworthy priest, have touched two crowns for having officiated in this chapel; I have even made a very good sermon there on the text: "God has separated the chaff from the wheat." It is in the gospel, God will separate; but I supposed, as it is a very long time since the gospel was written, I have supposed that the thing is done.'

'And the King knew of this sermon?' said Chicot.

'He heard it.'

'Without being angry?'

'Quite the contrary, he greatly applauded it.'

'You stupefy me,' said Chicot.

'It must be added,' said the officer, 'that nothing goes down but the sermon or the mass; there are good repasts at the château, without reckoning the promenades, and I think that nowhere in France do the moustaches promenade more, than in the walks at Nerac.'

Chicot had obtained more information than he required, upon which to build a plan.

He knew Margaret, from having seen her at Paris, holding her court; and he knew, besides, that if she was but little far-seeing in affairs of love, it was because she had some motive for placing a bandage over her eyes.

'Ventre de biche!' he said; 'on my faith, these alleys of cypress, and three thousand paces of shade, run disagreeably in my head. I shall tell the truth at Nerac, I who come from Paris, to men who have walks of three thousand paces, and such shades, that the women cannot see their husbands walking with their mistresses. Corbleu! they will pink me here, just to teach me how to trouble so many charming promenades. Luckily I know the philosophy of the King, and I trust to it; besides, I am ambassador, my head is saved, cheer up!'

And Chicot continued his journey.

He entered Nerac towards evening, just at the hour of the promenades, which so strongly preoccupied the King of France and his ambassador.

Besides, Chicot might convince himself of the easiness of the royal manners, by the mode in which he was admitted to an audience.

A plain footman opened to him the doors of a rustic saloon, the approaches to which were all variegated with flowers. Above the saloon, were the antechamber of the

King, and the chamber he loved to occupy during the day, to give those unconsequential audiences of which he was so prodigal.

An officer, hardly more than a page, went to apprise him when a visitor presented himself. This officer, or page, ran after the King until he found him, in whatever part he might be. The King came upon this simple invitation, and received the visitor.

Chicot was profoundly touched at this gracious facility; he judged the King good, candid, and very amorous.

This opinion became the stronger, when, at the extremity of a walk (not of three thousand paces, but of twelve or fifteen, at the extremity of a winding alley, bordered with laurels in flower), he saw arrive, with an old hat on his head, and a dead-leaf coloured doublet, and gray boots, the King of Navarre, out of breath, and a cup and ball in his hand.

Henry had a smooth forehead, as if no care had dared to touch it with its wing, a merry mouth, and an eye sparkling with health and carelessness.

Whilst approaching, he tore off, with his left hand, the flowers from the borders.

'Who wishes to speak with me?' he demanded of his page.

'Sire,' replied the latter, 'a man, who appears to me half seigneur, half soldier.' Chicot heard these last words, and gracefully advanced.

"Tis I, sire," he said.

'Good!' exclaimed the King, raising his two hands to heaven; 'Monsieur Chicot in Navarre! Monsieur Chicot at our house! Ventre Saint Gris! welcome, dear Monsieur Chicot.'

'A thousand thanks, sire.'

'In good health, thank God!'

'I hope so at least, dear sire,' said Chicot, at his ease.

'Ah! parbleu!' said Henry, 'we will drink together a bottle of Limoux, of which you shall give me your opinion. Really you make me quite happy, Monsieur Chicot; sit down there.'

And he pointed to a turf bench.

'Never, sire,' said Chicot, refusing.

'Have you ridden two hundred leagues to come and see me, then, and I allow you to stand? No, Monsieur Chicot, sit, sit; we can't converse unless seated.'

“ ‘But, sire, respect.’

‘Respect with us in Navarre; you are mad, my dear Chicot; and who, then, thinks of such a thing?’

‘No, sire, I am not mad,’ replied Chicot; ‘I am an ambassador.’

A slight wrinkle formed itself on the forehead of the King; but it disappeared so rapidly, that Chicot, observer as he was, did not even notice the trace.

‘Ambassador!’ said Henry, with a surprise which he attempted to render innocent; ‘ambassador from whom?’

‘Ambassador from King Henry the Third; I come from Paris and from the Louvre, sire.’

‘Ah! that is a different case,’ said the King, rising from his turf bench with a sigh; ‘retire, page. Carry up wine to the first-floor chamber; no, in my cabinet. Come with me, Chicot, I will conduct you.’

Chicot followed Henry of Navarre. Henry walked quicker now than in coming from his alley of laurels.

‘What misery,’ thought Chicot, ‘to come and trouble this honest man, in his peace and ignorance. Bah! he will be a philosopher.’

CHAPTER XLV

HOW THE KING OF NAVARRE GUESSED THAT ‘TURENNIUS’ MEANT TURENNE, AND ‘MARGOTA’ MARGARET

THE cabinet of the King of Navarre was not very sumptuous, as we may presume. His Majesty of Bearnais was not rich, and, with the little he had, committed no follies. This cabinet occupied, with the state bed-chamber, the whole right wing of the château. There was a corridor between the antechamber, or guard-room, and the sleeping-room; this corridor led to the cabinet.

From this apartment, somewhat spacious, and comfortably furnished, although there was no appearance of royal luxury, the view extended over some magnificent meadows, through which ran the river.

Large willow and plane trees hid the course of the river, without preventing the sight from being sometimes dazzled, when the stream, issuing, like a mythological

god, from its foliage, made the midday sun to glitter in its golden scales, or the midnight luminary, its draperies of silver.

The windows looked on one side upon this magical panorama, terminated in the distance by a chain of hills, a little burned in the noonday sun, but which, at night, bounded the horizon with their violet tints of an admirable limpidity; and on the other side, on the court of the château. Thus lighted on the east and west, by the double rank of windows, corresponding one with the other, red here, blue there, the hall had a magnificent appearance, when it reflected the first rays of the sun, or the pearly azure of the rising moon.

These natural beauties obtained less attention from Chicot, it must be confessed, than the distribution of the cabinet, the usual residence of Henry. In each piece of furniture, the intelligent ambassador seemed to search for a letter, and this with much more attention, that the collection of these letters would give him the answer to the enigma he had so long been guessing, and which he had, more especially, sought for throughout his journey.

The King seated himself, with his usual good nature and his eternal smile, in a large leather fauteuil, with gilt nails, but woollen fringe. Chicot, to obey him, rolled opposite to him a folding chair, or rather a stool; covered with the same stuff, and enriched with the same *costly* ornaments.

Henry looked at Chicot with all his eyes, and smiling, but at the same time with an attention which a courtier would have found fatiguing.

'You will find that I am very curious, dear Monsieur Chicot,' thus commenced the King; 'but it is stronger than I am; I have looked upon you for so long a time as dead, that, despite the joy your resurrection causes me, I cannot bring myself to the idea that you are living. Why, then, did you disappear all of a sudden from this world?'

'Eh! sire!' said Chicot, with his usual liberty, 'you also disappeared from Vincennes; each suffers an eclipse according to his means, and especially his necessities.'

'You have always more wit than any one, dear Monsieur Chicot,' said Henry, 'and it is this particularly that convinces me I am not speaking to a ghost.'

Then assuming a serious air;—

'But come,' he added, 'we shall put aside wit, and talk of business.'

'If it does not too much fatigue your Majesty, I am at your Majesty's orders.'

The King's eye sparkled.

'Fatigue me !' he repeated; and in another tone, 'it is true that I grow rusty here,' he added calmly, 'but I am not fatigued as long as I have done nothing; but to-day, Henry of Navarre has, from here and there, much dragged about his body, but the King has not yet set his mind to work.'

'Sire, I am very glad of it,' replied Chicot; 'as the ambassador of a King, your relation, and your friend, I have some very delicate commissions to fulfil towards your Majesty.'

'Speak quickly, then, for you excite my curiosity.'

'Sire !'

'Your letters of credit, first; 'tis a useless formality, I know, since it relates to you; but still, I wish to show you, that, a Bearnaise peasant as we are, we know our duty as a king.'

'Sire, I ask pardon of your Majesty,' replied Chicot; 'but all that I had of letters of credit, I drowned in the river, threw into the fire, scattered in the air.'

'And why so, dear Monsieur Chicot ?'

'Because we do not travel, when we repair to Navarre, charged with an embassy, as we travel to purchase cloth at Lyons; and that if we have the dangerous honour of carrying royal letters, we only run the risk of carrying them to the grave.'

'It's true,' said Henry, with perfect good nature, 'the roads are not safe, and, in Navarre, we are reduced, for want of money, to trust ourselves to the honesty of clowns; besides, they are not many of them thieves.'

'How !' exclaimed Chicot; 'why, they are lambs, they are little angels, sire, but in Navarre only.'

'Ah ! ah !' said Henry.

'Yes, but out of Navarre, we meet with wolves and vultures round every prey. I was a prey, sire, so that I had my vultures and my wolves.'

'Who did not eat you up entirely, which I see with pleasure.'

'Ventre de biche ! sire, it was not their fault; they did all they could for that, but they found me too tough, and

did not break my skin. But, sire, let us leave here, if you please, the details of my journey, which are idle matters, and let us return to our letter of credit.'

'But since you have none, my dear Monsieur Chicot,' said Henry, 'it seems to me of no use to return to it.'

'That is, I have none now, but that I had one.'

'Ah ! well then, give it me, Monsieur Chicot.'

And Henry extended his hand.

'Here is the misfortune, sire,' resumed Chicot; 'I had a letter, as I have had the honour of informing your Majesty, and few men have had a better.'

'You lost it ?'

'I hastened to destroy it, sire, for M. de Mayenne ran after me to steal it from me.'

'Cousin Mayenne ?'

'In person.'

'Luckily he does not run very fast. Does he still get fat ?'

'Ventre de biche ! not at this moment, I suppose.'

'And why so ?'

'Because, in running, understand, sire, he had the misfortune to rejoin me, and in the encounter, my faith ! he caught a very neat sword cut.'

'And of the letter ?'

'Not a shadow of it, thanks to the precautions I had taken.'

'Bravo ! you were wrong in not being willing to recount your journey to me, Monsieur Chicot; tell it me in detail, it interests me greatly.'

'Your Majesty is very good.'

'But one thing disturbs me.'

'Which ?'

'If the letter is destroyed for M. de Mayenne, it is also destroyed for me; how shall I know, then, what my brother Henry writes me, since his letter is not in existence ?'

'Pardon, sire, it exists in my memory.'

'How so ?'

'Previous to tearing it in pieces, I learned it by heart.'

'An excellent idea, Monsieur Chicot, excellent, and I can well recognise in that the mind of a compatriot. You will recite it to me, eh ?'

'Willingly, sire.'

'Such as it was, without the slightest change ?'

'Without giving the wrong sense.'

'How do you say?'

'I say, that I will recite it to you faithfully; although I am ignorant of the language, I have a good memory.'

'What language?'

'The Latin language, then.'

'I do not comprehend you,' said Henry, regarding the address of Chicot, 'you speak of the Latin language, of a letter——'

'Without doubt.'

'Explain yourself; was my brother's letter written in Latin, then?'

'Yes, sire.'

'Why in Latin?'

'Ah! sire, no doubt, because the Latin is an audacious language, a tongue that can speak all things, the language in which Persian and Juvenal have immortalised the follies and errors of kings.'

'Of kings?'

'And of queens, sire.'

The brow of the King contracted.

'I mean of emperors and empresses,' said Chicot.

'You know Latin then, M^{onsieur} Chicot?' said Henry coldly.

'Yes and no, sire.'

'You are very lucky if 'tis yes, for you have an immense advantage over me, who do not know it; so that I have never been able to attend seriously the mass, by reason of this devil of Latin; you know it, then?'

'I learned to read it, sire, as well as Greek and Hebrew.'

'Tis very useful, M^{onsieur} Chicot, you are a living book.'

'Your Majesty has just found the word, a living book. They print a few pages in my memory, they expedite me where they like; I arrive, they read me, and understand me.'

'Or they do not understand you.'

'How so, sire?'

'Why, if they are ignorant of the language in which you are printed.'

'Ah! sire, kings know all.'

'Tis what they say to the people, M^{onsieur} Chicot, and what the flatterers say to kings.'

'Then, sire, it is useless for me to recite to your Majesty

this letter, which I have learned by heart, since neither one nor the other of us will understand anything of it.'

'Has not Latin a great analogy to the Italian?'

'They say so, sire.'

'And with Spanish?'

'Very great, as they say.'

'Then, make an attempt, I know a little of Italian, my Gascon patois much resembles the Spanish; perhaps I shall comprehend the Latin without having ever learned it.'

Chicot bowed.

'Your Majesty orders, then?'

'That is, I request you, dear Monsieur Chicot.'

Chicot made his debut with the following phrase, which he prefaced with all sorts of preambles:—

"*Frater Carrissime,*

"*Sincerus amor quo te prosequeretur germanus noster Carolus, nonus, functus nuper, colet usque regiam nostram et pectori meo pertinaciter adheret.*"'

Henry did not once frown, but at the last word he stopped Chicot by a sign.

'Either I am much deceived,' he said, 'or in this sentence they speak of love, obstinacy, and of my brother Charles the Ninth.'

'I do not deny it, sire,' said Chicot, 'the Latin is so pretty a tongue that one sentence might comprise all this.'

'Continue,' said the King.

Chicot continued.

The Bearnais listened with the same coldness to all the passages in which there was any mention of his wife and the Viscount de Turenne; but at the last name:—

'Does not *Turennius* mean Turenne?' he said.

'I think it does, sire.'

'And *Margota*, is it not the little name of affection, which my brother, Charles the Ninth and Henry the Third, gave their sister, my much loved wife Margaret?'

'I see nothing impossible in it,' replied Chicot, and he pursued his recital to the end of the last sentence, without the features of the King once changing their expression.

At length he stopped at the peroration, the style of which he had caressed with such a sonorous emphasis, that we might have supposed it a paragraph from one of the Verrines, or a discourse for the poet Archias.

'Is it finished?' inquired Henry.

'Yes, sire.'

'Well ! 'tis superb.'

'Is it not, sire ?'

'What a pity that I do not understand but two words of it,—*Turennius* and *Margota*. And again——'

'An irreparable misfortune, sire, unless your Majesty decides upon having the letter translated by some clerk.'

'Oh ! no !' said Henry quickly, 'and you, Monsieur Chicot, who have shown so much discretion in your embassy, in doing away with the original autograph, would not advise me to hand this letter over to publicity ?'

'I do not say so, sire.'

'But you think so ?'

'I think, since your Majesty questions me, that the letter of the King, your brother, recommended to me with so much care, and despatched to your Majesty by a private messenger, contains, perhaps, here and there, some good thing by which your Majesty might profit.'

'Yes, but to confide these good things to some one, I must have in this some one full confidence.'

'Certainly.'

'Well ! do one thing,' said Henry, as if enlightened by an idea.

'Which ?'

'Go and find my wife Margota, she is learned; recite to her this letter, and, to a certainty, she will understand it; and then, very naturally, she will explain it to me.'

'Ah ! this is admirable !' exclaimed Chicot, 'and your Majesty speaks wisdom itself.'

'Isn't it ? Go !'

'I run, sire.'

'Change not a word of the letter, above everything.'

'That would be impossible for me; I must know Latin, and I do not know it, some barbarism at the most.'

'Go, go ! my friend, go !'

Chicot received information as to where he might find Madame Margaret, and quitted the King, more convinced than ever that the King was an enigma.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE ALLEY OF THREE THOUSAND STEPS

THE Queen inhabited the other wing of the château, divided in nearly the same fashion as the one Chicot had left.

Some music was generally heard on this side, and a peahen usually strutting about.

The famous alley of three thousand steps, of which there had been so much talk, commenced at the very windows of Margaret's wing, and her sight rested on none but agreeable objects, such as tufts of flowers, green bowers, etc.

One would have said that the poor Queen endeavoured to drive away, by the view of these cheerful objects, many a gloomy idea that dwelt amongst her thoughts.

'A poet—Margaret, in the province, as at Paris, was always the star of poets—a poet had composed a sonnet on this head.

'She wished,' he said, 'by the care she took, to place a garrison in her heart, to drive from it every gloomy remembrance.'

Born at the foot of the throne, daughter, wife, and sister of a king, Margaret had, in fact, deeply suffered. Her philosophy, more boasting than that of the King of Navarre, was less solid, because it was only factitious, and the result of study; whilst that of the King sprung from its own foundation.

Thus Margaret, philosopher as she was, or rather as she wished to be, had already allowed time and troubles to stamp their expressive lines on her features.

She was, nevertheless, still of a remarkable beauty; a beauty of physiognomy, especially, which strikes less individuals of a vulgar rank, but which pleases most among the illustrious, to whom we are always ready to accord the supremacy of physical beauty.

Margaret had a kind and cheerful smile, a brilliant and melting eye, a supple and graceful carriage. Margaret, we have said, was still an adorable creature.

As a woman, she walked like a princess; as a queen, she had the step of a charming woman.

She was therefore idolised at Nerac, into which she imported elegance, life, and joy. She, a Parisian princess, had patiently resigned herself to a provincial residence; this was already a virtue which the provincials acknowledged with the greatest goodwill.

Her court was not simply a court of gentlemen and ladies, the whole people loved her at once, as a woman and as a queen; and truly, the harmony of her flutes and violins, like the smoke and ornaments of her feasts, were open to every one.

She knew how so to employ her time, that each of her days profited her something, and none of them were lost for those who surrounded her.

Filled with hatred for her enemies, but patient, that she might the better avenge herself; retaining instinctively, under the envelope of indifference and forbearance of Henry of Navarre, an ill feeling towards him, and a satisfied conscience for all her steps; without relations, without friends, Margaret had accustomed herself to live with love, or, at the least, with the semblance of love, and to replace, with poetry and well-being, family, husband, friends, and the rest.

None but a Catherine de Medicis, none but a Chicot, none but a few melancholy spirits, returned from the kingdom of darkness, could have explained why the cheeks of Margaret were already so pale—why her eyes were so frequently drowned with unknown griefs—why, indeed, this profound heart discovered its emptiness, even in her look, once so expressive.

Margaret had no longer any confidants; the poor Queen had wearied of them, since the others had, for the sake of gold, betrayed her confidence and her honour.

She therefore marched by herself, and this, perhaps, doubled in the eyes of the Navarrese, without themselves suspecting it, the majesty of this attitude, more remarkable by its isolation.

For the rest, this ill feeling she retained against Henry, was quite instinctive, and sprung rather from her own consciousness of her wrongs, than from the deeds of the Bearnais. Henry indulged in her, a daughter of France; he never spoke of her but with an obsequious politeness, or a gracious ease; on all occasions, and respecting all matters, his manners towards her were those of a husband and a friend.

Thus the court of Nerac, like all other courts living in friendly relations, overflowed in physical and moral harmonies.

Such were the studies and reflections made, upon appearances, as yet very trifling, by Chicot, the greatest observer, and the most methodical of men.

He was at first presented at the palace, instructed by Henry, but he had found no one there. Margaret, he had been told, was at the end of the beautiful alley parallel with the river; and he repaired to this alley, which was the famous walk of three thousand steps, through the laurel walk.

When he had reached about a third of the alley, he perceived, at the other extremity, under a bower of Spanish jasmine, gillyflowers, and clematis, a gay group of ribbons, feathers, and velvet swords; all this fine frippery was, perhaps, a little out of taste, a little out of fashion; but for Nerac it was brilliant; even dazzling. Chicot, who had come straight from Paris, was satisfied with the *coup d'œil*.

As a page of the King preceded Chicot, the Queen, whose eyes wandered here and there with the everlasting uneasiness of a melancholy heart, recognised the colours of Navarre, and called him.

'What do you desire, d'Aubiac?' she inquired.

The young man, we might call him a child, for he was scarcely fourteen, blushed and bent his knee before Margaret.

'Madame,' he said in French, for the Queen insisted on their proscribing the patois on every occasion of service, and every matter of business, 'a gentleman from Paris, sent from the Louvre to his Majesty the King of Navarre, and by the King of Navarre to you, desires to speak with your Majesty.'

A sudden colour lit up the handsome face of Margaret; she turned round quickly, and with that painful sensation which upon every occasion penetrates a wounded heart.

Chicot was standing up and motionless, at twenty paces from her.

Her subtle eyes recognised, by the carriage and side face, for the Gascon stood between her and the orange-coloured sky, a figure she knew; she quitted the circle, instead of commanding the new arrival to approach.

On again turning to say adieu to the company, she

made a sign, with the tips of her fingers, to one of the most richly dressed and handsome of the gentlemen.

The adieu for all, was, in reality, an adieu to a single one.

But as the favoured cavalier did not appear quite at his ease, despite this salutation, the object of which was to reassure him, and that the eye of a woman saw everything.

'Monsieur de Turenne,' said Margaret, 'will you be kind enough to say to these ladies, that I shall return in a moment?'

The handsome beau, with the white and blue doublet, bowed with more alacrity than would have done an indifferent courtier.

The Queen advanced with a quick step towards Chicot, who had observed the whole of this scene, so well in harmony with the phrases of the letter he was the bearer of, without moving an inch.

'Monsieur Chicot!' exclaimed Margaret, astonished, accosting the Gascon.

'At the feet of your Majesty,' said Chicot; 'of your Majesty, still kind, and still handsome, and still a queen at Nerac, as at the Louvre.'

'Tis a miracle to see you at such a distance from Paris, sir.'

'Pardon me, madame, for it is not the poor Chicot who had the idea of performing this miracle.'

'I really believe so; you were dead, they said.'

'I played the dead.'

'What do you desire of us, Monsieur Chicot? am I so particularly happy, that they think of the Queen of Navarre in France?'

'Oh! madame,' said Chicot, smiling, 'be easy; with us, queens are not forgotten, when they are of your age, and especially possess your beauty.'

'They are still gallant at Paris, then?'

'The King of France,' added Chicot, without replying to the last question, 'even, writes to the King of Navarre on this subject.'

Margaret blushed.

'He writes?' she said.

'Yes, madame.'

'And 'tis you who have brought the letter?'

'Brought! no, for reasons which the King of Navarre

will explain to you; but learnt by heart, and repeated from memory.'

'I understand; this letter was of importance, and you feared it would be lost, or stolen from you?'

'That is the truth, madame; now your Majesty will excuse me; the letter was written in Latin.'

'Ah! very well!' exclaimed the Queen, 'you know that I understand Latin.'

'And the King of Navarre, madame,' said Chicot, 'does he know it?'

'Dear Monsieur Chicot,' replied Margaret, 'it is very difficult to know what the King of Navarre understands, or does not understand.'

'Ah, ah!' said Chicot, glad to see that he was not the only one guessing at the solution of the enigma.

'If we are to believe appearances,' continued Margaret, 'he knows but little of it, for he never understands, or at least appears not to understand, when I speak in this language with any of the court.'

Chicot bit his lips.

'Ah! the devil!' he said.

'Have you recited this letter to him?' said Margaret.

'It was to him the letter was addressed.'

'And did he appear to understand it?'

'Only two words of it.'

'Which were they?'

'*Turennius et Margota.*'

'*Turennius et Margota?*'

'Yes; these two words were in the letter.'

'Then what did he do?'

'He has sent me to you, madame.'

'To me?'

'Yes, saying this letter apparently contained matters too important to be translated by a stranger; and that it would be best for you to do it, who are the prettiest of the learned, and the most learned amongst the prettiest.'

'I will listen to you, Monsieur Chicot, since 'tis the order of the King, that I listen to you,' said Margaret, a little affected.

'Thanks, madame; where does it please your Majesty that I speak?'

'Here! no, no; better in the château. Come to my cabinet, I beg of you.'

Margaret steadily regarded Chicot, who, out of pity

perhaps to her, had allowed her beforehand to lift up a corner of the veil.

The poor woman felt the want of support, of a last return to love, perhaps, before submitting to the trial which menaced her.

'Viscount,' she said to M. de Turenne, 'your arm as far as the château. Precede us, Monsieur Chicot, I entreat you !'

CHAPTER XLVII

THE CABINET OF MARGARET

WE would not be accused of describing nothing but festoons and flowers, and scarcely allowing the reader to escape from the garden; but like master, like residence; and if it was not useless to describe the alley of three thousand steps, and the cabinet of Henry, it may also be somewhat interesting to sketch the cabinet of Margaret.

Parallel with that of Henry, and furnished with back doors, opening into chambers and passages, windows, complaisant and silent, like the doors, hidden by iron jalousies or blinds, with locks, the keys of which turned without noise; such was the exterior of the Queen's cabinet.

In the interior, modern furniture, carpets of the reigning fashion, paintings, enamels, chinaware, weapons of value, books and manuscripts of Greek, Latin, and French, loaded the tables; birds in their cages, dogs on the carpets, an entire world, in fact, vegetables and animals, living a life in common with Margaret.

Individuals of superior minds, or an over-abundance of energy, cannot march through life alone; they accompany each of their senses, each of their caprices, with everything in harmony with it, and which their attractive force draws into their vortex; so that, instead of having lived and felt as ordinary people, they have decupled their sensations, and doubled their existence.

Certainly, Epicurus is a hero for humanity; the pagans themselves did not appreciate him; he was a severe philosopher, but one who, determined that nothing should be lost in the amount of our knowledge and resources, procured, in his inflexible economy, pleasures

to many, who, acting very spirituelly or very vulgarly, would find nothing but privations or vexations.

But we have much declaimed against Epicurus, without knowing him; and we have highly praised also, without knowing them, those pious anchorets of the Thebaide, who annihilated the best of human nature by neutralising the worst. To kill a man, is to destroy, with him, no doubt, the passions; but still, it is to kill him; a matter which God forbids, with all His might and in all His laws.

The Queen was a woman to appreciate Epicurus, in Greek, at first sight, which was the least of her merits; she so well employed her life, that with many troubles she could compose at pleasure; which, in her quality of a Christian, gave her the right to bless God oftener than man, whether called God or Theos, Jehovah or Magog.

This digression clearly proves the necessity we were under of describing the apartments of Margaret.

Chicot was invited to seat himself in a handsome and comfortable fauteuil, with tapestry representing Love scattering a cloud of flowers; a page, who was not d'Aubiac, but who was handsomer and more richly dressed, presented further refreshments to the messenger.

Chicot did not accept, and commenced his duty, when the Viscount de Turenne had quitted the room, to recite, with a most imperturbable memory, the letter of the King of France and Poland by the grace of God.

We know this letter, which we read in English at the same time as Chicot; we therefore consider it perfectly useless to give the Latin translation.

Chicot pronounced this translation with the strangest accent possible, that the Queen might be as long as possible in comprehending it; but skilful as he was in travestying his own work, Margaret caught it on the wing, and in no way concealed her fury or her indignation.

In proportion as he advanced in the letter, Chicot sunk deeper and deeper in the embarrassment he had created for himself; at certain difficult passages he bent his head like a confessor embarrassed at what he is listening to; and at this play of the physiognomy he had a great advantage, for he did not see the eyes of the Queen sparkle, and her nerves contract, at such positive enunciation of her conjugal misdeeds

Margaret was not ignorant of the refined malice of her brother; many occasions had proved it to her; she knew also, for she was not a woman to dissemble anything to herself, she knew how to comport herself respecting the grounds she had furnished, and those she might yet furnish; so that, as Chicot read, the balance between legitimate anger and reasonable fear established itself in her mind.

To be indignant at the proper moment, to mistrust herself at the right time, to avoid the danger whilst repulsing the injury, to prove the injustice whilst profiting by the advice, this was the grand work going on in the mind of Margaret, whilst Chicot continued his epistolary narration.

We must not suppose that Chicot remained with his nose eternally bent down; Chicot lifted now one eye, then the other, and at length became easy, on seeing that, under her half-frowning eyebrows, the Queen very mildly decided upon her part.

He finished then, with much tranquillity, the salutations of the royal letter.

'By the holy communion!' said the Queen, when Chicot had concluded, 'my brother writes handsomely in Latin; what vehemence! what style! I never supposed him of such strength.'

Chicot made a movement with his eye, and opened his hands like a man who appears to approve from politeness, but does not understand.

'You do not comprehend?' said the Queen, to whom all languages were familiar, even that of the mimic; 'I thought you, however, a strong Latinist, sir.'

'Madame, I have forgotten it; all that I know at present, all that remains to me of my old science, is, that the Latin has no article, that it has a vocative, and that the head is of the neuter gender.'

'Ah! really!' exclaimed a personage, on entering; all hilarity and noise; Chicot and the Queen turned round at the same time.

'Twas the King of Navarre.

'What!' said Henry, approaching, 'the head in Latin is of the neuter gender, Monsieur Chicot! and why, then, is it not of the masculine gender?'

'Ah, damn, sire!' said Chicot, 'I cannot say, as it astonishes me as much as your Majesty.'

'And me also,' said Margaret in a reverie; 'it astonishes me.'

'It must be,' said the King, 'because it is sometimes the man, and sometimes the woman who is master; and this, according to the temperament of the man or the woman.'

Chicot bowed.

'This is certainly,' he said, 'the best reason I know, sire.'

'So much the better; I am enchanted at being a deeper philosopher than I supposed. Now let us return to the letter; know, madame, that I burn to hear the news of the French court, and that is just what this brave M. Chicot brings me in an unknown tongue;' without which——'

'Without which ?' repeated Margaret.

'Without which I should have been delighted. *Ventre Saint Gris!* you know how I like news, and especially scandalous news, as my brother Henry of Valois knows so well how to recount.'

And Henry of Navarre seated himself, rubbing his hands.

'Come, Monsieur Chicot,' continued the King, with the air of a man who prepares himself for enjoyment, 'you have recited this famous letter to my wife, have you not ?'

'Yes, sire.'

'Well ! my dear, tell me a little of what this celebrated letter contains.

'Do you not fear, sire,' said Chicot, made uneasy at this freedom, of which the two crowned heads set him the example, 'that this Latin in which the missive in question is written, is an evil prognostic.'

'Why so ?' said the King.

And turning towards his wife,—

'Well ! madame ?' he said.

Margaret collected herself for a moment, as if she passed in review, one by one, to comment upon them, each of the phrases dropped from the mouth of Chicot.

'Our messenger is right, sire,' she said, when her examination had concluded, and her part taken, 'the Latin is a bad prognostic.'

'Eh, what !' said Henry, 'does this dear letter contain villainous proposals ? beware, my dear, the King your

brother is a clerk of the first order, and extreme politeness.'

'Even when he has me insulted in my litter, as it happened a few leagues from Sens, when I left Paris to rejoin you, sire.'

'When one has a brother, himself of severe morals,' said Henry, in that indefinite tone which held a middle line between gravity and pleasantry, 'a brother a king, a brother punctilious——'

'Ought to be so for the real honour of his sister and of his house; for, in fact, I do not suppose, sire, that if Catherine d'Albret, your sister, occasioned you any scandal, you would have this scandal published by a captain of the guards.'

'Ah! as for me, I am a patriarchal and benign bourgeois,' said Henry; 'I am not a king; or, if I am such, it is to laugh, and, my faith! I do laugh. But the letter, the letter, since it is to me it is addressed, I desire to know its contents.'

'Tis a perfidious letter, sire.'

'Bah!'

'Oh, yes! and contains more calumnies than are needed, to embroil not only a husband with his wife, but a friend with all his friends.'

'Ah! ah!' said Henry, drawing himself up, and arming his features, naturally so frank and so open, with an affected defiance; 'embroil a husband and a wife, you and I, then?'

'You and myself, sire.'

'And why so, my honey?'

Chicot felt himself on thorns, and would have given anything, although very hungry, to have gone to bed without his supper.

'The cloud will burst,' he murmured to himself, 'the cloud is breaking.'

'Sire,' said the Queen, 'I much regret that your Majesty has forgotten your Latin, which you must have learnt, however.'

'Madame, I remember but one thing of all the Latin I ever learnt, and it is this sentence: *Deus et virtus æterna*—a singular union of the masculine, the feminine, and the neuter, that my professor could never explain to me but in Greek, which at present I understand less than Latin.'

'Sire,' continued the Queen, 'if you understood, you would find in the letter forced compliments of every kind towards me.'

'Ah, very good !' said the King.

'*Optime*,' said Chicot.

'But in what way,' said Henry, 'can compliments for you, embroil us, madame ? for indeed, as long as my brother Henry compliments you, I shall agree with my brother Henry; if they spoke ill of you in this letter, ah ! it would be a different affair, madame, and I should comprehend the policy of my brother.'

'Oh ! if they spoke ill of me, you would understand the policy of Henry ?'

'Yes, of Henry of Valois; I know that he has motives for embroiling us.'

'Attend, sire, for these compliments are but an insinuating exordium to arrive at calumniating insinuations against your friends and mine.'

And after these words, boldly spoken, Margaret expected a contradiction.

Chicot bent down his head, Henry shrugged his shoulders.

'See, my dear,' he said, 'if, after all, you have well understood the Latin, and whether this serious inattention is really in the letter of my brother.'

Softly and unctuously as Henry pronounced these words, the Queen of Navarre favoured him with a glance full of defiance.

'Understand me to the end, sire,' she said.

'I desire nothing better, madame, God is my witness,' replied Henry.

'Have you occasion, or not, for your servants, come ?'

'Have I occasion for them, my dear ? what a question ! What should I do without them, and reduced to my own resources, my God ?'

'Well ! sire ! the King would detach from you, your best servants.'

'I defy him to do so.'

'Bravo, sire !' murmured Chicot.

'Eh ! undoubtedly,' said Henry, with that surprising good humour so peculiar to him, that, to the end of his life, every one was taken by it; 'for my servitors are attached to me in their heart, and not from interest. I have nothing to give them; not I !'

'You give them all your heart, all your faith, sire, 'tis the best return a king can make his friends.'

'Yes, my honey; well?'

'Well! sire, have no more faith in them.'

'Ventre Saint Gris! I shall not fail to, if they force me to it, that is, if they cease to deserve it.'

'Good! in that case,' said Margaret, 'it shall be proved to you, that they have ceased to merit it, sire; that's all.'

'Ah! ah!' said the King; 'but in what?'

Chicot again bent down his eyes, as he did in every difficult moment.

'I cannot tell you this, sire,' replied Margaret, 'without compromising——' and she looked round her.

Chicot perceived that she was embarrassed, and drew back.

'Dear messenger,' said the King to him, 'will you have the goodness to wait for me in my cabinet? the Queen has something private to say to me, something very serviceable to me, as well as I can anticipate.'

Margaret remained motionless, with the exception of a slight sign of the head, which Chicot fancied he had alone understood.

Seeing, therefore, that he afforded a pleasure to the Queen and her husband in going, he rose and left the room, bowing to them both at once.

CHAPTER XLVIII

COMPOSITION IN VERSE

To remove this witness, whom Margaret supposed better read in Latin than he was willing to admit, was already a triumph, or at all events a pledge of security for her; for we have observed, Margaret did not think Chicot so ill lettered as he pretended; whilst with her husband alone, she could give to each Latin word, more extension, or commentary, than all the scholastics in *us* would ever give to Plautus or Persius, those two enigmas in long verse of the Latin world.

Henry and his wife, then, had the satisfaction of a *tête-à-tête*.

The King had in his countenance no appearance of

uneasiness, nor any symptom of suspicion. Decidedly, the King knew nothing of Latin.

'Monsieur,' said Margaret, 'I wait for you to question me.'

'This letter troubles you greatly, my honey,' he said; 'do not thus alarm yourself.'

'Sire, 'tis that this letter is, or ought to be, an event; a king does not thus send a messenger to another king, without reasons of the highest importance.'

'Well! then,' said Henry; 'let us have the message and the messenger, my sweet: have you nothing in the shape of a ball for this evening?'

'As a project? yes, sire,' said Margaret, astonished; 'but there is nothing extraordinary in that, you know that we dance nearly every evening.'

'And I have a hunt for to-morrow morning, a grand hunt.'

'Ah!'

'Yes, a battue of wolves.'

'We have each our pleasure, sire; you like the chase, I the ball; you hunt, I dance.'

'Yes, my sweet,' said Henry, sighing; 'and really there is no harm in it.'

'Certainly, but your Majesty says this with a sigh.'

'Listen to me, madame.'

Margaret became all ears.

'I have troubles.'

'On what subject, sire?'

'On the subject of a report that is being spread.'

'Of a report? your Majesty is alarmed at a report?'

'What is more simple, my love, when this report might cause you pain?'

'To me?'

'Yes, to you.'

'Sire, I do not comprehend you.'

'Have you heard nothing spoken of?' said Henry, in the same tone.

Margaret began to tremble, lest this may not be a mode of attack by her husband.

'I am the least curious woman in the world, sire,' she said, 'and I hear nothing but what is blown into my ears; besides, I hold so lightly what you call reports, that I scarcely understand them when listened to; the strongest reason for stopping my ears as they pass.'

'Tis your opinion then, madame, that we should despise these rumours ?'

'Absolutely, sire, and especially we sovereigns.'

'Why us, especially, madame ?'

'Because, as sovereigns, being in every one's mouth, we should have really too much to do, if we troubled ourselves about them.'

'Well ! I think you are right, my sweet, and I will furnish you with an excellent opportunity for applying your philosophy.'

Margaret supposed the decisive moment arrived, she collected all her courage, and, in a firm tone :—

'Be it so, sire, with all my heart,' she said.

Henry commenced in the tone of a penitent, who has some great sin to confess.

'You know the great interest I take in my child; Fosseuse ?'

'Ah ! ah !' exclaimed Margaret, finding it had no reference to herself, and assuming an air of triumph.

'Yes, yes, to the little Fosseuse, your friend ?'

'Yes, madame,' replied Henry, still in the same tone, 'yes, to the little Fosseuse.'

'My maid of honour ?'

'Your maid of honour.'

'Your folly, your love ?'

'Ah ! my love, you are now speaking like one of those reports, you were but this instant accusing.'

'It's true, sire,' said Margaret, smiling; 'and I very humbly ask pardon of you.'

'My love, you are right, public report often lies; and we kings, especially, have often great need of establishing this theory as an axiom. *Ventre Saint Gris !* madame, I think I am speaking Greek.'

And Henry burst into a laugh.

Margaret read an irony in this boisterous mirth, and especially, in that pointed regard that accompanied it.

A little uneasiness again took possession of her.

'About Fosseuse, then ?' she said.

'Fosseuse is ill, my love, and the physicians understand nothing of her disease.'

'Tis strange, sire, Fosseuse, who, according to your Majesty, has always remained prudent; Fosseuse, who, to listen to you, would have resisted a king, if a king had spokento her of love; Fosseuse, this flower of purity, this

limpid crystal, must allow the eye of science to penetrate to the depth of her joys and her griefs.'

'Alas! it is not thus,' said Henry sorrowfully.

'What!' exclaimed the Queen, with that impatient malice, which the most superior woman never fails to launch like a dart against another woman; 'what! Fosseuse is not a flower of purity.'

'I did not say that,' replied Henry dryly; 'God preserve me from accusing any one, I say, that my child Fosseuse is attacked with a malady, which she persists in concealing from the physicians.'

'To the physicians, it may be so; but towards you, her confidant, her father, this seems very strange to me.'

'I know no more of it, my sweet,' replied Henry, resuming his gracious smile, 'or if I do, I think it wise to stop there.'

'Then, sire,' said Margaret, who fancied she discovered, from the turn of the conversation, that she had the advantage, and that it was she who had to grant a pardon, instead of having one to solicit; 'then, sire, I know not what your Majesty desires, and I will wait for your explanation.'

'Well! since you wait, my love, I will narrate the whole to you.'

Margaret made a movement, indicating that she was ready to hear all.

'You must,' continued Henry, 'but 'tis much to exact from you, my sweet.'

'Say on, sire.'

'You must have the kindness to transport yourself to my child Fosseuse.'

'I render a visit to this girl, who, they say, has the honour of being your mistress, an honour you do not decline.'

'Come, come, softly, my love,' said the King, 'on my word, you will create a scandal with these exclamations; and I know not, really, whether the scandal you will cause, would not delight the court of France, for in this letter of the King, my brother-in-law, which Chicot has recited to me, there is, *quotidie scandalum*, that means, for a humble grammarian like myself, daily scandal.'

Margaret made another movement.

'It is not necessary to know Latin for this,' continued Henry, 'tis almost French.'

'But, sire, to whom would these words be applicable ?' said Margaret.

'Ah ! that is what I am unable to comprehend, but you, who understand Latin, will assist me when we come to that point, my love.'

Margaret blushed to her very ears, whilst, with his head bent down, his hand raised, Henry appeared to be innocently seeking to discover to which of the persons of his court the *quotidie scandalum*, might be applied.

'Very well, sire,' said the Queen, 'you wish, in the name of concord, to drive me to a humiliating step; in the name of concord, I will obey.'

'Thanks, my sweet, thanks,' said Henry.

'But what is the object of this visit, sire ?'

'It is quite simple, madame.'

'Yet I must be told it, as I am simple enough not to guess it.'

'Well, you will find Fosseuse, in the midst of the maids of honour, lying down, in their room. These sort of females, you know, are so curious, and so indiscreet, that we know not to what extremity Fosseuse may be reduced.'

'But she fears something, then,' exclaimed Margaret, with an increase of rage and hatred; 'she wishes to be concealed.'

'I do not know,' said Henry; 'what I know is, that she wishes to quit the chamber of the maids of honour.'

'If she wishes to hide herself, let her not reckon upon me. I can shut my eyes to certain things, but never will I be their accomplice.'

And Margaret waited the effect of her ultimatum.

But Henry appeared not to have heard it; he had allowed his head to drop again, and had resumed that thoughtful attitude, which had struck Margaret an instant before.

'*Margota*,' he murmured, '*Margota cum Turenno*. These are the two names I seek, madame; *Margota cum Turenno*.'

Margaret, this time, became crimson.

'Calumnies, sire!' she exclaimed, 'are you going to repeat to me these calumnies?'

'What calumnies ?' said Henry, as natural as possible; 'is it that you understand calumnies by this, madame ? 'tis a passage from the letter of my brother that occurs to me; *Margota cum Turenno conveniunt in castello*

nomine Loignac. Decidedly, I must have this letter translated for me by a clerk.'

'Come, let us cease this play, sire,' said Margaret, quaking, 'and tell me plainly what you expect from me.'

'Well! I desire, my sweet, that you separate Fosseuse from the other girls, and that, having placed her in a room by herself, you send her only one physician, a discreet physician, your own for example.'

'Oh! I see how it is,' exclaimed the Queen; 'Fosseuse, who boasted of her virtue, Fosseuse, who displayed a lying chastity, Fosseuse is pregnant, and ready to be confined.'

'I do not say so, my love,' said Henry; 'I do not say that, 'tis you who affirm it.'

'It is so, sire, it is so,' exclaimed Margaret; 'your insinuating tone, your false humility, prove it to me. But there are sacrifices, that even a king does not demand from his wife. Repair, yourself, the wrongs of mademoiselle de Fosseuse, sire, you are her accomplice, it is your affair; to the guilty the punishment, and not to the innocent.'

'To the guilty, right! there you again recall to me the terms of that horrible letter.'

'And how so?'

'Yes, guilty, is *nocens*, is it not?'

'Yes, sire, *nocens*.'

'Well! there is in the letter: *Margota cum Turenno, ambo nocentes, conveniunt in castello nomine Loignac.* My God! how I regret not having a mind well ornamented, a memory sure.'

'*Ambo nocentes*,' repeated Margaret softly, paler than her white lace collar; 'he understands, he understands.'

'*Margota cum Turenno, ambo nocentes.* What the devil does my brother mean by *ambo*? 'unmercifully continued Henry of Navarre. 'Ventre Saint Gris! my love, it is very astonishing, that, knowing the Latin as you do, you have not yet given me the explanation of this sentence, which puzzles me.'

'Sire, I have already had the honour of telling you——'

'Eh! pardieu!' interrupted the King, 'here is precisely *Turennius*, promenading under your windows, and looking up, as though he expected you, poor boy; I will sign to him to ascend, he is very learned, he will tell me what I wish to know.'

'Sire ! sire !' exclaimed Margaret, rising from her fauteuil, and clasping her two hands, 'sire, be greater than all these busybodies, these calumniators of France.'

'Eh ! my sweet, we are not more indulgent in Navarre than in France, it seems to me, and just now, you yourself were very severe towards the poor Fosseuse.'

'Severe ! me ?' exclaimed Margaret.

'I appeal to your memory; true, however, we ought to be indulgent, madame; we lead so gentle a life, you, in the balls you adore; I, in the chase I love.'

'Yes, yes, sire,' said Margaret, 'let us be indulgent.'

'Oh ! I was quite sure of your heart, my sweet.'

'Because you know me, sire.'

'Yes; you will go and see Fosseuse, then, will you not ?'

'Yes, sire.'

'And separate her from the other girls ?'

'Yes, sire.'

'Send her your own physician ?'

'Yes, sire.'

'And no nurse. Physicians are discreet from their rank, nurses are gossips from habit.'

'Tis true, sire.'

'And if, unluckily, what they should say be true, and that, in reality, the poor girl has been feeble, and yielded——'

Henry raised his eyes to heaven.

'Which is very possible,' he continued, 'woman is frail, *res fragilis mulier*, as the Evangelist says.'

'Well, sire, I am a woman, and I know the indulgence I ought to have for other women.'

'Ah ! you know everything, my sweet; you are really a model of perfection, and——'

'And ?'

'And I kiss your hands.'

'But believe, sire,' said Margaret, 'that 'tis from love to you alone, that I make such a sacrifice.'

'Oh ! oh !' said Henry; 'I know you well, madame, and my brother of France, also, who says so many good things of you in his letter, and who adds, *Fiat sanum exemplum statim, atque res certior eveniet*. This good example, no doubt, is the one you give, my love.'

And Henry kissed the half-frozen hand of Margaret, then stopping at the doorway :—

'A thousand kindnesses from me to Fosseuse, madame,'

he said; 'take charge of her, as you have promised me to do. I am going to the chase, perhaps I may not again see you till my return, perhaps, even never, these wolves are wicked brutes; come, let me embrace you, my life.'

He embraced Margaret almost affectionately, and left, leaving her stupefied at all she had just heard.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE SPANISH AMBASSADOR

THE King rejoined Chicot in his cabinet.

Chicot was still agitated with fears as to the explanation.

'Well, Chicot!' said Henry.

'Well, sire!' replied Chicot.

'You do not know what the Queen pretends?'

'No.'

'She pretends, that your villainous Latin will disturb her whole house.'

'Eh, sire!' exclaimed Chicot, 'for God's sake, let us forget the Latin, and there will be an end of it. It is not the same with a morsel of Latin spoken, as with a morsel written; the wind carries away the one, fire cannot sometimes succeed in consuming the other.'

'For my part, I think no more about it, or the devil fetch me!' said Henry.

'So much the better.'

'I have really something else to do, my faith, than think of this.'

'Your Majesty prefers diverting yourself, heim!'

'Yes, my son,' said Henry, very discontented at the tone with which Chicot had pronounced these few words; 'yes, my Majesty would rather divert himself.'

'Pardon, but perhaps I inconvenience your Majesty.'

'Eh, my son!' said Henry, shrugging his shoulders, 'I have already told you it is not here as at the Louvre. Here we make love, war, and politics in open day.'

The regard of the King was so sweet, his smile so winning, that Chicot found himself emboldened.

'War and politics, less than love, eh, sire?' he said.

'My faith, yes, my dear friend, I admit it; this country

is so delightful, these wines of Languedoc so relishing, these women of Navarre so handsome !

'Eh ! sire,' continued Chicot, 'you forget the Queen, it appears to me; are the women of Navarre prettier and more complaisant than her, by chance ? if so, I compliment the Navarrese.'

'Ventre Saint Gris, you are right, Chicot; and I who forget that you are an ambassador, that you represent the King Henry the Third, that the King Henry the Third is the brother of Madame Margaret, and that, consequently, before you, for propriety's sake, I ought to place Madame Margaret above all women ! But you must excuse my imprudence, Chicot; I am not accustomed to ambassadors, my son.'

At this moment the door of the cabinet opened, and d'Aubiac announced in a loud voice :—

'Monsieur the Spanish Ambassador.'

Chicot made a start from his fauteuil, which drew a smile from the King.

'My faith,' said Henry, 'this is a contradiction I did not expect. The Spanish Ambassador. And what the devil is he come here to do ?'

'Yes,' repeated Chicot, 'what the devil does he do here ?'

'We shall know,' said Henry; 'perhaps our neighbour the Spaniard has some disturbance on the frontier to discuss with me.'

'I will retire,' said Chicot humbly. 'He is probably a real ambassador, whom His Majesty Philippe the Second sends you, whilst I——'

'The French ambassador give place to the Spanish ambassador, and that in Navarre; ventre Saint Gris ! it shall not be so; open that study, and install yourself in it, Chicot.'

'But, there, I shall hear everything, despite myself, sire.'

'Eh ! you will hear, morbleu ! what matter, I have nothing to conceal. A propos ! you have nothing more to say to me, from the King, your master, Monsieur the Ambassador ?'

'No, sire, absolutely nothing else.'

'Just so, you have nothing but to see and hear, then, like all the ambassadors of the earth, you will be well placed, therefore, in the study, to fulfil your charge. Look with all your eyes, and listen with all your ears, my dear Chicot.' He then added :—

'D'Aubiac, tell my captain of the guards to introduce M. the Spanish Ambassador.'

Chicot, on hearing this order, hastened to enter the study, and carefully let down the tapestried screen.

A slow and affected step resounded over the sonorous floor; it was that of the ambassador of His Majesty Philippe the Second.

When the preliminaries devoted to the details of etiquette, were concluded, and Chicot was enabled to convince himself, from his hiding-place, that the Bearnais had fully decided upon giving an audience,—

'May I speak freely to your Majesty?' demanded the envoyé, in the Spanish language, which every Gascon or Bearnais understood like that of his country, from their constant analogy.

'You can speak, sir,' replied the Bearnais.

Chicot opened two large ears, the interest was great for him.

'Sire,' said the ambassador, 'I bring the reply of His Catholic Majesty.'

'Good!' said Chicot, 'if he brings the reply, there must have been a demand.'

'Touching what subject?' inquired Henry.

'Touching your overtures of last month, sire.'

'My faith! I am very forgetful,' said Henry; 'will you have the kindness to recall to me these overtures, Monsieur the Ambassador?'

'Respecting the invasions of the Lorraine princes into France.'

'Yes, and particularly those of my neighbour de Guise. Very well! I remember now; continue, sir, continue.'

'Sire,' resumed the Spaniard, 'the King, my master, although solicitous to sign a treaty of alliance with Lorraine, has regarded an alliance with Navarre as more loyal, and, in plain terms, more advantageous.'

'Yes, let us speak plain,' said Henry.

'I shall be frank with your Majesty, sire, for I know the intentions of the King, my master, regarding your Majesty.'

'And may I know them?'

'Sire, the King, my master, has nothing to refuse to Navarre.'

Chicot glued his ear to the tapestry, biting the end of his finger to assure himself that he was not asleep.

'If they have nothing to refuse me,' said Henry, 'let us see what I may demand.'

'Whatever your Majesty may please, sire.'

'The devil!'

'Your Majesty, therefore, can speak openly and candidly.'

'Ventre Saint Gris! 'tis embarrassing.'

'His Majesty the King of Spain would place his new ally at his ease; the proposition I shall make to your Majesty will be a proof of it.'

'I am all attention,' said Henry.

'The King of France treats the Queen of Navarre as a sworn enemy; he repudiates her as a sister the moment he covers her with opprobrium: this is constant. The wrongs of the King of France are, and I ask pardon of your Majesty for approaching so delicate a subject——'

'Approach, approach?'

'The wrongs of the King of France are public, notoriety has consecrated them.'

Henry made a movement of contradiction.

'There is a notoriety,' continued the Spaniard, 'as we are instructed; I repeat, therefore, sire, the King of France repudiates Madame Margaret for his sister, since he endeavours to dishonour her, by having her litter stopped in public, by having her searched by a captain of his guards.'

'Well! Monsieur the Ambassador, to what are you coming?'

'Nothing is easier, in consequence, for your Majesty to repudiate as a wife, she whom her brother repudiates as a sister.'

Henry looked towards the tapestry, behind which Chicot, with staring eyes, awaited in a palpitation the result of so pompous a debut.

'The Queen repudiated,' continued the ambassador, 'the alliance between the King of Navarre and the King of Spain——'

Henry bowed.

'This alliance,' continued the ambassador, 'is fully concluded, in this way. The King of Spain gives the Infanta, his daughter, to the King of Navarre, and His Majesty himself espouses Madame Catherine of Navarre, the sister of your Majesty.'

A shudder of pride ran through the body of the Bearnais

—a shudder of alarm through the body of Chicot. The one saw rising in the horizon, his fortune, radiant as the rising sun—the other saw descending and dying, the sceptre and fortune of the Valois.

The Spaniard, impassible and frozen, saw nothing but the instructions of his master.

For a moment there was a profound silence; and after this, the King of Navarre replied:—

‘The proposition, sir, is magnificent, and overwhelms me with honour.’

‘His Majesty,’ hastened to say the proud negotiator, who reckoned upon an acceptation with enthusiasm; ‘His Majesty the King of Spain purposes to submit to your Majesty but one condition.’

‘Ah! one condition,’ said Henry, ‘tis but too just; let us hear the condition.’

‘In assisting your Majesty against the princes of Lorraine, that is, in opening the road to the throne for your Majesty, my master would wish to facilitate, by your alliance, a means of keeping Flanders, at which Monseigneur the Duke of Anjou, is now biting with all his teeth. Your Majesty well comprehends that it is quite a preference given you by my master, over the princes of Lorraine, since MM. de Guise, his natural allies as Catholic princes, alone make a party against M. the Duke of Anjou, in Flanders; but here is the condition, the only one; it is reasonable and mild. His Majesty the King of Spain will ally himself with you by a double marriage, he will assist you to——’ the ambassador hesitated a moment in finding the proper word, ‘to succeed the King of France, and you shall guarantee to him, Flanders. I can now, therefore, knowing the wisdom of your Majesty, regard my negotiation as happily accomplished.’

A silence more profound than the former succeeded to these words, in order, no doubt, that there might arrive in all its power the answer, which the exterminating angel expected to strike either here or there—France or Spain.

Henry of Navarre took two or three steps in his cabinet.

‘Then, sir,’ he said at length, ‘this is all the reply you are charged to bring me?’

‘Yes, sire.’

‘And nothing with it?’

‘Naught else.’

'Well !' said Henry, 'I refuse the offer of His Majesty the King of Spain !'

'You refuse the hand of the Infanta !' exclaimed the Spaniard, with a seizure like that caused by the pain of a wound we did not expect.

'A very great honour, sir,' replied Henry, drawing up his head, 'but which I cannot believe superior to the honour of having espoused a daughter of France.'

'Yes, but this first alliance beckons you to the tomb, sire ! the second beckons you to the throne !'

'A precious, incomparable fortune, sir, I know it, but which I will never purchase with the blood and honour of my subjects. What ! sir, shall I draw the sword against the King of France, my brother-in-law, for the Spaniard, a stranger ? what ! shall I arrest the standard of France in its path of glory, to suffer the towers of Castile, and the lions of Leon, to finish the work he has commenced ? what ! shall I have brothers slain by brothers ? shall I bring a stranger into my country ! Sir, listen well to this : I have demanded of my neighbour, the King of Spain, assistance against the MM. de Guise, who are jealous and greedy for my heritage, but not against the Duke of Anjou, my brother-in-law ; but not against the King, Henry the Third, my friend ; but not against my wife, sister of my King. You will assist the Guises, you say, you will lend them your support ? Do so ; I will launch against them and against you, every Protestant of Germany and of France. The king of Spain would reconquer Flanders which escaped from him : let him do as his father Charles Quint did ; let him demand from the King of France, a passport to go and reclaim his title as first bourgeois of Gand, and King Henry the Third, I will be his guarantee, will give him as loyal a passage, as did the King Francis the First. "I desire the throne of France," says His Catholic Majesty ; "'tis possible, but I do not want him to aid me in conquering it ; I shall easily take it alone when vacant, and this, despite every majesty in the world." Thus then adieu, sir. Say to my brother Philippe, that I am very grateful for his offers ; but I should be mortally offended with him if, on making them, he had supposed me, for a single moment, capable of accepting them. Adieu, sir.'

The ambassador remained stupefied, he stammered out :—

'Beware, sire, the good intelligence between two neighbours depends upon an ill word.'

'Monsieur the ambassador,' said Henry, 'know this, well; King of Navarre or king of nothing, is all one to me. My crown is so light, that I should not even feel it drop, should it slide from my brow; besides, at present, I am inclined to retain it, be assured.'

'Adieu, once more, sir; say to the King your master, that I have higher ambitions than those he has offered me. Adieu.'

And the Bearnais, again becoming, not himself, but the man we know him to be, after allowing himself to be governed for a moment by the warmth of his heroism—the Bearnais, smiling courteously, reconducted the Spanish ambassador to the threshold of his cabinet.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE POOR OF THE KING OF NAVARRE

CHICOT was plunged in a surprise so profound that, Henry left alone, he did not even think of leaving the study.

The Bearnais raised the tapestry and tapped him on the shoulder.

'Well! Maître Chicot,' he said, 'how do you think I got out of it?'

'Wonderfully, sire,' replied Chicot, still in amazement. 'But really, for a king who does not often receive ambassadors, it appears, that when you do receive them, you receive them well.'

'Tis, however, my brother Henry to whom I am indebted for these ambassadors.'

'How so, sire?'

'Yes, if he did not incessantly persecute his poor sister, the others would not dream of persecuting her. Think you, that if the King of Spain had not known the public affront offered to the Queen of Navarre, when a captain of the guards searched her litter; think you, they would have proposed to me to repudiate her?'

'I see with pleasure, sire,' replied Chicot, 'that all they attempt will be in vain, and that nothing will disturb the

good harmony that exists between yourself and the Queen.'

'Eh! my friend, the interest they have to embroil us is but too clear.'

'I confess to you, sire, that I am not so penetrating as you imagine.'

'No doubt, all that my brother Henry desires, is that I repudiate his sister.'

'How so? explain the matter to me, I beg. Plague! I did not think I had come to so good a school.'

'You know that they have forgotten to pay me my wife's dower, Chicot?'

'No, I did not know it, sire; but I suspected it.'

'That this dower consisted of three hundred thousand crowns of gold?'

'A handsome present.'

'And of several towns by way of security, and amongst others, Cahors?'

'A pretty town, mordieu!'

'I have demanded not my three hundred thousand gold crowns—poor as I am, I consider myself richer than the King of France—but Cahors.'

'Ah! you have reclaimed Cahors, sire? *Ventre de biche!* you have done well; and in your place I would have done the same.'

'And this is the reason,' said the Bearnais, with his cunning smile, 'here is the reason—do you comprehend now?'

'No, the devil take me!'

'This is the reason they wish to embroil me with my wife to such a point that I repudiate her; no wife, you understand, Chicot, no dower; consequently no more of the three hundred thousand crowns, no more towns, and especially, no Cahors; 'tis a mode, as well as any other, of eluding one's promise; and my brother of Valois is very expert in that sort of trap.'

'You would much wish, however, sire, to hold this place; would you not, sire?' said Chicot.

'Without doubt, for, in fact, what is my royalty of Bearn? a poor little principality, which the avarice of my brother-in-law, and of my mother-in-law, have so clipped, that the title of king, which is attached to it, is become a title of ridicule.'

'Yes, whilst Cahors adds to this principality.'

'Cahors would be my Boulevard, the safeguard of those of my religion.'

'Well! my dear sire, put on your mourning for Cahors; for, whether you are embroiled with Madame Margaret or not, the King of France will never deliver it to you, and unless you take it——'

'Ah!' exclaimed Henry, 'I would take it willingly, were it not so strong, and especially if I did not hate war.'

'Cahors is impregnable, sire,' said Chicot.

Henry armed his features with an impenetrable *naïveté*.

'Ah! impregnable, impregnable,' he said; 'if also I had an army, which I have not.'

'Listen, sire,' said Chicot, 'we are not here to say soft nothings to each other. Between Gascons, you know, we speak frankly. To take Cahors, where M. de Vezin is, you must be either a Hannibal or a Cæsar, and your Majesty——'

'Well! my Majesty?' demanded Henry, with his penetrating smile.

'Your Majesty has said it—you do not like war.'

Henry sighed, a spark illuminated his eye, full of melancholy; but restraining at once this involuntary movement, he smothered, with his hand, browned with the sun, his rough and dark beard, saying:—

'I have never drawn the sword, it is true; never will I draw it; I am a king of straw, and a man of peace. And yet, Chicot, by a strange contrast, I like to amuse myself with affairs of war, 'tis in my blood; Saint Louis, my ancestor, had this happiness, that being pious from education, and gentle by nature, he became, occasionally, a rough joister with the lance, a valiant swordsman. Let us talk, if you like, Chicot, of M. de Vezin, who is a Cæsar and a Hannibal.'

'Sire, pardon me,' said Chicot, 'if I have not only wounded you, but also disturbed you. I only spoke to you of M. de Vezin, to extinguish every vestige of a foolish flame, that youth, and ignorance in affairs might cause to spring up in your heart. Cahors, you see, is so well defended, and so well guarded, because it is the key of the south.'

'Alas!' said Henry, sighing more deeply, 'I know it well!'

'It is,' continued Chicot, 'territorial wealth united to

security of habitation; to have Cahors is to possess lofts, cellars, strong chests, barns, lodgings, and relations, to possess Cahors is to have all for oneself; not to possess Cahors, is to have everything against one.'

'Eh! ventre Saint Gris!' murmured the King of Navarre, 'this is the reason I so much wished to possess Cahors, that I told my poor mother to make it one of the conditions *sine qua non* of my marriage; excuse my speaking Latin at present, Cahors, then, was the appendage of my wife; they had promised it to me, they owe it to me.'

'Sire, to owe and to pay——' said Chicot.

'You are right; to owe and to pay are two very different things, my friend; so that your own opinion is, that they will not pay it to me?'

'I am afraid of it.'

'The devil!' said Henry.

'And frankly,' continued Chicot.

'Well?'

'Frankly, they are right, sire.'

'They are right; why so, my friend?'

'Because you have not known how to pursue your trade of a king, the consort of a daughter of France; because you did not know how to have your dower paid first, and restore your towns afterwards.'

'Miserable!' said Henry, sighing bitterly, 'you do not remember, then, the tocsin of Saint Germain l'Auxerrois? It appears to me, that a husband whom they would slay the very night of his wedding day, does not think so much of his dower as his life.'

'Good!' said Chicot, 'but since——'

'Well! since?' said Henry.

'Yes, we have had peace, I think. We should profit by this peace, to work; you should (excuse me, sire), you should, instead of making love, negotiate. 'Tis less amusing, I know, but more profitable; I tell you this, sire, really, as much for the King my master, as for yourself. If Henry of France had, in Henry of Navarre, a strong ally, Henry of France would be stronger than the whole world; and supposing that Catholics and Protestants could unite in the same political interest, free to argue their religious interests afterwards, Catholics and Protestants, that is the two Henrys, would, of themselves, make the whole world tremble.'

'Ah! as for myself,' said Henry, with humility, 'I do not aspire to make any one tremble; and provided I do not tremble myself—But stay, Chicot, let us say no more about these matters, which trouble my mind. I have not Cahors; well, I will do without it.'

'Tis hard, my King.'

'What would you, since you yourself think that Henry will never restore me this town?'

'I think so, sire; I am sure of it, and this for three reasons.'

'Mention them to me, Chicot.'

'Willingly; the first is, that Cahors is a town of great production, which the King of France would sooner reserve than give it to any one.'

'That is not altogether honest, Chicot.'

'Tis royal, sire.'

'Ah! 'tis royal to take what pleases us?'

'Yes, this is called taking the lion's share; and the lion is the king of beasts.'

'I shall remember what you now tell me, my good Chicot, if ever I become a king. Your second reason, my son?'

'Is this: Madame Catherine——'

'My good mother Catherine still interferes in politics, then?' said Henry.

'Madame Catherine would still sooner see her daughter at Paris than at Nerac, with her than with you.'

'You think so? She does not, however, love her daughter over fondly.'

'No, but Madame Margaret is a sort of hostage for you, sire.'

'You are perfect in finesse, Chicot. The devil fetch me, if I should ever have thought of that; but indeed you may be right; yes, yes, a daughter of France, at a pinch, is a hostage. Well?'

'Well! sire, by dismissing the resources, they diminish the pleasure of the residence. Nerac is a very agreeable town, possesses a charming park, and walks such as exist nowhere; but Madame Marguerite, deprived of resources, will be wearied of Nerac, and will regret the Louvre.'

'I like your first reason best, Chicot,' said Henry, nodding his head.

'Then I will tell you my third.'

'Between the Duke of Anjou, who is endeavouring to create for himself a throne and is moving Flanders; between MM. de Guise, who would forge for themselves a crown, and are moving France; between His Majesty the King of Spain, who would try his hand at universal monarchy, and who moves the world, you, prince of Navarre, hold the balance and maintain a certain equilibrium.'

'Really! I, without weight?'

'Exactly! Look at the Swiss republic. Become powerful, that is, weighty, and you will carry off the plate. You will no longer be a counterpoise, you will be a weight.'

'Oh! I like that reason much, Chicot, and it is perfectly well deduced. You are really a clerk, Chicot.'

'My faith, I am as I am,' said Chicot, flattered, such as it was, with the compliment, and allowing himself to be caught, by that royal good nature to which he was not accustomed.

'This then is the explanation of my situation?' said Henry.

'Complete, sire.'

'And I, who saw nothing of all this, Chicot, I who always hoped, do you understand?'

'Well! sire, if I have any advice to give you, it is to cease from hoping.'

'I will do then, Chicot, for this creditor of France, that which I do for those of my farmers who cannot pay me their rent; I place a P by the side of their names.'

'Which means, paid?'

'Exactly.'

'Place two P's, sire, and give a sigh.'

Henry sighed.

'Thus will I do it, Chicot,' he said. 'For the rest, my friend, you see that one can live at Bearn, and that I am not absolutely in want of Cahors.'

'I see it, and, as I fancied, you are a wise prince, a royal philosopher; but what is that noise?'

'Noise? where?'

'Why, in the court, I think.'

'Look from the window, my friend, look.'

Chicot approached the window.

'Sire,' he said, 'there is below a dozen men not very well accoutred.'

'Oh! they are my poor,' said the King of Navarre, rising.

'You Majesty has your poor?'

'Without doubt; does not God recommend charity? although not a Catholic, I am not the less a Christian.'

'Bravo, sire.'

'Come, Chicot, let us go down; we will give charity together, and then mount to supper.'

'Sire, I follow you.'

'Take that purse on the little table, near my sword; do you see?'

'I have it, sire.'

'That will do.'

They now descended; night had approached. The King whilst walking, appeared preoccupied, full of care.

Chicot regarded him, and felt sad at this preoccupation.

'Where the devil did I get the idea,' he said to himself, 'of coming here to speak of politics to this worthy prince? I have made his heart sick, really! absurd clown that I am, bah!'

Once descended into the court, Henry of Navarre approached the group of mendicants who had been signalled by Chicot.

There were, in fact, a dozen men different in stature, physiognomy, and costume; men whom an inattentive observer would have remarked from their voice, their step, their gestures, as being Bohemians, strangers, individual passengers; but whom a skilful observer would have recognised for disguised gentlemen.

Henry took the purse from the hands of Chicot, and made a sign.

All the mendicants appeared to understand perfectly this sign.

Each in his turn saluted him with an air of humility, which did not exclude a regard full of intelligence and audacity, addressed to the King alone, as much as to say to him:—

'Under this envelope, the heart burns.'

Henry replied by a sign of the head, and, introducing his thumb and forefinger into the purse which Chicot held open, he took out a piece of money.

'Eh!' said Chicot, 'you know that it is gold, sire?'

'Yes, my friend, I know it.'

'Plague! you are rich.'

'Do you not see, my friend,' said Henry, with a smile, 'that each of these pieces of gold serve me for a double gift? I am poor, on the contrary, Chicot, and I am forced to cut my pistoles into two, that life may be maintained.'

'It's true,' said Chicot, with increasing surprise, 'the coins are the halves of pieces cut with capricious designs.'

'Oh! I am like my brother of France, who amuses himself in cutting out images, I have my hobbies; I amuse myself, in my idle moments, in clipping my ducats. A poor and honest Bearnais is as industrious as a Jew.'

'Tis just the same, sire,' said Chicot, nodding his head, for he surmised some fresh mystery hidden under this; 'tis all the same, but a strange mode of giving charity.'

'You would act otherwise, perhaps?'

'Yes, my faith, instead of taking the trouble of separating each piece, I would give it entire, saying: "This is for two."'

'They would fight, my dear, and I should be creating scandal whilst doing good.'

'Indeed!' murmured Chicot, summing up in this word, which is the quintessence of all philosophies, his opposition to the strange ideas of the King.

Henry then took a half piece of gold from the purse, and placing himself before the first mendicant, with that calm and mild mien which composed his habitual deportment, he looked at the man without speaking, but not without interrogating him with a glance.

'Agen,' said the latter, bowing.

'How many?' demanded the King.

'Five hundred.'

'Cahors,' and he handed him the piece, and took another from the purse. The mendicant saluted more profoundly than before, and moved away. He was succeeded by another, who bowed with humility.

'Auch,' he said, inclining.

'How many?'

'Three hundred and fifty.'

'Cahors,' and he handed him the second piece, and took another from the purse. The second disappeared like the first. A third approached and bowed.

'Narbonne,' he said.

'How many?'

'Eight hundred.'

'Cahors,' and he handed him the third piece, and took another from the purse.

'Montauban,' said a fourth.

'How many?'

'Six hundred.'

'Cahors.'

All, in fact, approaching and bowing, pronounced a name, received the strange alms, and mentioned a number, the total of which amounted to eight thousand.

To each of them Henry replied, 'Cahors,' without, upon any occasion, varying the accentuation of his voice in pronouncing the word.

The distribution concluded, there were no more pieces left in the purse, no more mendicants in the court.

'There,' said Henry.

'This is all, sire?'

'Yes, I have finished.'

Chicot pulled the King by the sleeve.

'Sire?' he said.

'Well!'

'May I be allowed to be inquisitive?'

'Why not? curiosity is very natural.'

'What did these mendicants say to you? and what the devil did you reply to them?'

Henry smiled.

'Tis, that here everything really appears mysterious.'

'You think so?'

'Yes; I have never seen charity dispensed in this fashion.'

'Tis the custom at Nerac, my dear Chicot. You know the proverb: "Every town has its custom."'

'A strange custom, sire.'

'No, the devil take me, and nothing is more simple; all the men you see, travel the country to receive charity; but they are each of different towns.'

'Well, sire.'

'Well! that I may not always give to the same, they tell me the name of their town; by this mode, you understand, my dear Chicot, I can equally divide my benefits, and I am useful to all the poor of all the towns in my state.'

'Yes, sire, this is all very plain as to the name of the towns they mention; but why did you reply, Cahors?'

'Oh !' said Henry with an air of well-feigned surprise, 'I replied to them : Cahors.'

'Parbleu !'

'You think so ?'

'I am sure of it.'

'Tis, you see, that since we have spoken of Cahors, I have always this word in my mouth. It is with this as with all other things we cannot obtain, though we ardently desire; we think of them, and, in thinking of them, name them.'

'Heim !' said Chicot, regarding, with suspicion, the side towards which the mendicants had disappeared; 'tis much less clear than I like, sire; there is also, besides this—'

'How ! there is something else ?'

'There is the number that each pronounced, and which, summed up, makes a total of more than eight thousand.'

'Oh ! as to this number, Chicot, I am like yourself, I did not comprehend, unless that, as the mendicants are, as you know, divided into corporations, unless they mentioned the number of the members of each of these corporations, which to me seems probable.'

'Sire ! sire !'

'Come to supper, my friend; nothing expands the spirits, in my opinion, like eating and drinking. We will seek the table, and you will find that if my ducats are clipped, my bottles are full.'

The King whistled a page, and demanded supper.

And passing his arm familiarly in that of Chicot, he remounted to his cabinet, where the supper was served.

On passing before the apartment of the Queen, he gave a glance at the windows, and saw there was no light.

'Page,' he said, 'is not Her Majesty the Queen within ?'

'Her Majesty,' replied the page, 'is gone to see Made-moiselle de Montmorency, who they say, is very ill.'

'Ah ! poor Fosseuse,' said Henry; 'it's true, the Queen has a good heart. Come to supper, Chicot, come.'

CHAPTER. I

THE REAL MISTRESS OF THE KING OF NAVARRE

THE repast was one of the merriest. Henry seemed to have nothing on his mind nor in his heart, and when in this disposition, the Bearnais was an excellent companion.

As to Chicot, he dissembled, in his best manner, that commencement of inquietude which had taken hold of him at the apparition of the Spanish ambassador, had followed him into the court, had increased at the distribution of gold to the mendicants, and which had not yet left him.

Henry had preferred that his neighbour Chicot should sup *tête à tête* with him, as at the court of King Henry. He had always experienced a great weakness for Chicot—one of those weaknesses that men of talent feel towards men of the mental cast; and Chicot, on his part, saving the embassy from Spain, the mendicants with the password, and the gold pieces clipped, Chicot had a great sympathy for the King of Navarre.

Chicot seeing the King change the wine, and conducting himself in every point as a merry convive, resolved to humour him a little, in such a way as to allow none of the sallies of the Bearnais, which the liberty of the repast, and the fumes of the wine inspired, to escape.

Henry drank neat, and he had a fashion of drawing on his guests, which did not permit Chicot to remain behind more than one glass out of three.

But the head of Monsieur Chicot was a head of iron.

As to Henry of Navarre, all these wines were wines of the country, he said, and he drank them like whey.

All this was seasoned with forced compliments, which the two convives exchanged between themselves.

‘How I envy you,’ said Chicot to the King, ‘and how amiable your court is, and what a flowery existence is yours, sire; what happy faces I see in this house, and what riches in this fine country of Gascony!’

‘If my wife were here, my dear Chicot, I would not tell you what I am going to tell you; but in her absence, I may admit to you, that the best portion of my life is that which you do not see.’

'Ah! sire, they speak very well of your Majesty.'

Henry threw himself back in his fauteuil, and caressed his beard, smiling.

'Yes, yes, eh!' he said, 'they pretend that I reign much more over my fair subjects than over my male subjects.'

'Tis the truth, sire, and yet this astonishes me.'

'How, my friend?'

'In this, sire, that you have much of that restless spirit which makes a great king.'

'Ah! Chicot, you deceive yourself,' said Henry; 'I am more idle than restless, and the proof of it is my whole life: if I have to make love, 'tis always the one nearest me; if 'tis wine I choose, 'tis always wine from the bottle nearest me. Your health, Chicot!'

'Sire, you do me honour,' replied Chicot, emptying his glass to the last drop; for the King regarded him with that cunning eye, which seemed to penetrate the very depth of his thoughts.

'Thus,' continued the King, lifting up his eyes, 'what quarrels in my household, neighbour!'

'Yes, I understand; all the maids of honour of the Queen adore you, sire!'

'They are my neighbours, Chicot.'

'Eh! eh! sire, it results from this axiom, that if you resided at Saint Denis, instead of living at Nerac, the King would not be enabled to live as tranquilly as he does.'

Henry became cloudy.

'The King! what are you saying, Chicot?' observed Henry of Navarre; 'the King! do you take me for a Guise? I wish to have Cahors, it's true, but it is because Cahors is at my door—still my system, Chicot. I have ambition, but when seated; once I have to rise, I feel no longer desirous of anything.'

'Ventre de biche! sire,' replied Chicot, 'this ambition for things within reach, greatly resembles that of Cæsar Borgia, who collected a kingdom, town by town, saying that Italy was an artichoke he must eat leaf by leaf.'

'That Cæsar Borgia was not so bad a politician, it seems to me, neighbour Chicot,' said Henry.

'No, but he was a very dangerous neighbour, and a very wicked brother.'

'Oh, ça! but do you compare me to a son of the pope:

I, chief of the Huguenots ? a moment, Monsieur the Ambassador.'

'Sire, I compare you to no one.'

'For what reason ?'

'For the reason, that I think he who would compare you to any other than yourself, would be deceived. You are ambitious, sire.'

'What strangeness !' said the Bearnais; 'here is a man who, with all his might, would force me to desire something.'

'God forbid, sire; on the contrary, I wish with all my heart that your Majesty would desire nothing.'

'Stay, Chicot,' said the King, 'nothing recalls you to Paris, eh ?'

'Nothing, sire.'

'You will pass some days with me, then ?'

'If your Majesty does me the honour of desiring my company, I wish for nothing better than to stay with you a week.'

'A week ! well, be it so, neighbour; in a week you will know me like a brother. Let us drink, Chicot.'

'Sire, I am no longer thirsty,' said Chicot, who began to renounce the pretension he had at first of making the King drunk.

'Then I quit you, neighbour,' said Henry; 'a man ought not to remain at table when he can do nothing. Drink, I tell you.'

'Why ?'

'To sleep the better. This small country wine produces a sleep full of sweets. Are you fond of the chase, Chicot ?'

'Not much, sire, and you ?'

'I am passionately fond if it myself, since my stay at the court of the King Charles the Ninth.'

'Why did your Majesty do me the honour to inquire if I loved the chase ?' demanded Chicot.

'Because I hunt to-morrow, and reckon upon taking you with me.'

'Sire, it would be a great honour, but——'

'Oh ! neighbour, be easy; this hunt is made to rejoice the heart and the eyes of every man of the sword. I am a good hunter, Chicot, and I am very desirous that you should see me to advantage. The devil ! you would know me, you say ?'

'Ventre de biche, sire, 'tis one of my greatest desires, confess.'

'Well ! 'tis a colour under which you have not yet studied me.'

'Sire, I will do anything to please the King.'

'Good ! 'tis a matter settled ! Ah ! here is a page ; we are disturbed.'

'Some affair of importance, sire ?'

'An affair ! for me, when I am at table ! 'Tis astonishing that this dear Chicot always fancies himself at the court of France. Chicot, my friend, know one thing, which is, that at Nerac——'

'Well ! sire ?'

'When we have made a good supper, we go to bed.'

'But this page ?'

'Well ! may not this page announce something besides business ?'

'Oh ! I understand, sire, and I will seek my bed.'

Chicot rose, the King did the same, and took the arm of his guest.

This haste to get him away, looked suspicious to Chicot, to whom everything, since the announcement of the Spanish ambassador, began to look suspicious. He resolved, therefore, not to leave the cabinet until as late as possible.

'Oh ! oh !' he said, reeling, ''tis astonishing, sire.'

The Bearnais smiled.

'What is there astonishing, neighbour ?'

'Ventre de biche ! my head swims. As long as I was seated, all went well ; but now that I have risen, brrr.'

'Bah !' said Henry, 'we have only tasted the wine.'

'Well done ! tasted, sire ? You call that tasting ? Bravo, sire ! ah ! you are a strong drinker, and I render you my homage, as my sovereign lord. Good ! you call that tasting, do you ?'

'Chicot, my friend,' said the Bearnais, attempting to convince himself, by one of those subtle glances that belonged to him alone, whether Chicot was really in his cups, or feigned being so ; 'Chicot, my friend, I think the best thing you can do at present is to go to bed.'

'Yes, sire ; good-night, sire.'

'Good-night, Chicot, and to-morrow——'

'Yes, sire, to-morrow ; and your Majesty is right, the best thing Chicot can do is to go to bed. Good-night, sire.'

And Chicot lay down on the floor.

On seeing this determination of his guest, Henry threw a glance at the door.

Rapid as was this glance, Chicot seized it in its passage. Henry approached Chicot.

'You are so drunk, my poor Chicot, that you do not perceive one thing.'

'Which?'

'That you take the mats of my cabinet for your bed.'

'Chicot is a man of war, Chicot despises such trifles.'

'Then you do not perceive two things?'

'Ah! ah! and what is the second?'

'It is that I expect some one.'

'To sup? very well! let us have supper.'

And Chicot made a useless attempt to raise himself.

'Ventre Saint Gris,' exclaimed Henry, 'since you are suddenly drunk, neighbour, get out of it; mordieu! you see plainly she is getting impatient.'

'She,' said Chicot; 'who is she?'

'Eh! mordieu! the woman I expect, and who is making a row at the door there.'

'A woman! ah! why didn't you say so, Henriquet; ah! pardon,' said Chicot, 'I thought—I thought I was speaking to the King of France. That good King Henry has spoiled me, you see. Why didn't you say so, sire? I go.'

'That's right, you are a real gentleman, Chicot. There, rise, and leave, for I have a good night to get through, do you hear? a whole night.'

Chicot got up, and gained the door, reeling.

'Adieu, sire; and a good night, then—good-night.'

'Adieu, dear friend, adieu; sleep well.'

'And you, sire?'

'Chuuut!'

'Yes, yes, chuuut!' and he opened the door.

'You will find the page in the gallery, and he will show you your room.'

'Thank you, sire.'

And Chicot left, after bowing as low as a drunken man could do.

But the moment the door was closed behind him, all trace of intoxication disappeared; he took three steps in advance, and suddenly returning, he placed his eye at the large lock.

Henry was already engaged in opening the door to the stranger, whom Chicot, curious as an ambassador, determined to know at any price.

Instead of a woman, it was a man who entered.

And when this man had taken off his hat, Chicot recognised the noble and severe countenance of Duplessis Mornay, the rigid and watchful minister of Henry of Navarre.

'Ah! the devil!' said Chicot, 'here's somebody who will surprise our wooer, and incommode him, certainly, more than I did myself.'

But the features of Henry, at this apparition, beamed with joy; he pressed the hands of the new-comer, pushed away the table with disdain, and made Mornay sit near him, with all the warmth with which a lover would approach his mistress.

He seemed anxious to catch the first words the councillor would pronounce; but on a sudden, and before Mornay had spoken, he rose, and signing to him to wait, he went to the door, and drew the bolts, with a circum-spection which gave Chicot much to think of.

He then fixed his regards on the charts, plans, and letters, which the minister successively brought under his attention.

They lighted more candles, and commenced writing and pointing to the geographical maps.

'Oh! oh!' said Chicot, 'this is the long night of the King of Navarre. *Ventre de biche!* if they all resemble this, Henry of Valois may well look over some of the bad ones.'

At this moment he heard some one walking behind him; it was the page, who guarded the gallery, and waited for him by order of the King.

Afraid of being surprised, if he remained longer listening, Chicot rose up and demanded his chamber of the page.

Besides, he had nothing more to learn, the apparition of Duplessis had told him all.

'Come with me, if you please, sir,' said d'Aubiac, 'I am charged to conduct you to your apartment.'

And he conducted Chicot to the second floor, where his room had been prepared.

Chicot had no further doubt; he knew half the letters composing the enigma which they called the King of Navarre. So, instead of going to sleep, he seated himself

sombre and pensive, on his bed : whilst the moon, falling on the sharp corners of the roof, shed, as from the top of a silver basin, its azured light on the river and meadows.

‘Come, come,’ said Chicot, gloomy, ‘Henry is a real king. Henry conspires; the whole palace, his park, the town that surrounds him, the province that surrounds the town, all is in a blaze of conspiracy; all the women make love; but the love of politics, every man forges for himself a hope for the future.

‘Henry is astute, his intelligence approaches genius; he has relations with Spain—the country of impostures; who knows if his noble reply to the ambassador is not the contrary of what he thinks; and if he did not, with a wink of the eye, apprise this ambassador, or by some other silent understanding, which I, concealed, could not catch ?

‘Henry keeps spies, he pays them, or gets them paid by some agent. These mendicants were neither more or less than gentlemen disguised. Their gold pieces, so artistically cut, are pledges of recognition, material and palpable passwords.

‘Henry feigns to be innocent and in love, and whilst he is supposed to be occupied with love, he passes his nights working with Mornay, who never sleeps, and knows not what love is. This is what I had to see; I have seen it. Queen Margaret has lovers, the King knows it; he knows them, and tolerates them, because he has still need of them and of her; perhaps of all at once. Not being a warlike man, he must keep captains; and not having much money, he is forced to allow them to choose the money that best suits them. Henry of Valois told me he did not sleep; *ventre de biche* ! he does well not to sleep. Luckily, again, this perfidious Henry is a good gentleman, to whom God, in giving him the genius of intrigue, has neglected to give him the strength of initiation. Henry, they say, fears the sound of muskets, and when quite young, he was led to the armies, they agree in narrating, he could not remain more than a quarter of an hour in the saddle.

‘Luckily,’ repeated Chicot; ‘for in the times in which we live, if, with intrigue, such a man had the arm, this man would be king of the world. There is certainly a Guise. That one possesses both virtues; he has intrigue, and an arm; but he has the disadvantage of being known as brave and skilful whilst no one fears the Bearnais. I alone

have dived into him.' And Chicot rubbed his hands. 'Well!' he continued, 'having guessed him, I have nothing more to do here; so whilst he is sleeping or working, I shall softly and tranquilly leave the town. There are not many ambassadors, I think, who can boast of having in one day accomplished their mission entirely, but I have done it. I shall leave Nerac, then; and once out of Nerac, I will gallop to France,' he said, and commenced fastening on his spurs, which he had taken off at the moment of presenting himself before the King.

CHAPTER LI

CHICOT'S ASTONISHMENT AT FINDING HIMSELF SO POPULAR IN THE TOWN OF NERAC

CHICOT, having resolved upon quitting incognito the court of the King of Navarre, commenced making his little travelling packet.

He simplified it in the best manner he could, holding, as a principle, that the less we carry, the faster we travel.

Assuredly his sword was the heaviest portion of the baggage he carried.

'Let me consider, how much time do I require,' he asked himself, whilst tying his packet, 'to communicate to the King the news of what I have seen, and consequently of what I fear ?

'Two days to arrive at a town, from which a good governor despatches couriers at the greatest speed.

'Let this town, for example, be Cahors—Cahors, of which the King of Navarre talks so much, and which so properly occupies him.

'Once there, I can repose myself; for, in fact, the strength of man has but a certain limit.

'I shall repose, therefore, at Cahors, and the horses shall run in my stead.

'Come, my friend Chicot, legs, activity, and *sang-froid*. You think you have accomplished the whole of your mission, simpleton; you have but half fulfilled it.'

This said, Chicot extinguished his light, opened, as gently as possible, his door, and began to leave it on tiptoe.

Chicot was an able strategist; he had, in following d'Aubiac, given a glance to the right, a glance to the left, one before, and one behind, and recognised all the localities.

An antechamber, a corridor, a staircase; then, at the bottom of this staircase, the court.

But Chicot had scarcely taken four steps in the antechamber, when he came in contact with something which immediately rose up.

This something was a page lying on the mat outside the chamber, and who, awakened, commenced saying:—

‘Eh! good-night, Monsieur Chicot, good-night.’

Chicot recognised d'Aubiac.

‘Eh! good-night, Monsieur d'Aubiac,’ he said; ‘but stand aside a little, if you please, I feel inclined for a walk,’

‘Ah! but it is forbidden to walk at night in the château, Monsieur Chicot.’

‘Why so, if you please, Monsieur d'Aubiac?’

‘Because the King fears robbers, and the Queen gallants.’

‘The devil!’

‘Why, it is only robbers and gallants who walk at night, instead of sleeping.’

‘And yet, dear Monsieur d'Aubiac,’ said Chicot, with his sweetest smile, ‘I am neither one nor the other; I am an ambassador, and an ambassador very fatigued in talking Latin with the Queen, and supping with the King; for the Queen is a rude Latinist, and the King a strong drinker. Allow me to go out, therefore, my friend, for I have a great desire for a promenade.’

‘In the town, Monsieur Chicot?’

‘Ah! no, in the gardens.’

‘Plague, in the gardens, Monsieur Chicot? this is still more strictly forbidden than in the town.’

‘My little friend,’ said Chicot, ‘’tis a compliment for you, but you are really very vigilant for one of your age. You have nothing then to occupy you?’

‘No!’

‘You are neither a gamester nor a lover?’

‘To play, we must have money, Monsieur Chicot; to be in love, we must have a mistress.’

‘Assuredly,’ said Chicot, and he searched in his pocket. The page observed what he was doing.

'Search your memory well, my dear friend,' he said to him, 'and I will bet that you find there some charming girl, for whom I beg you will purchase plenty of ribbons and plenty of music with this.'

And Chicot slid into the hand of the page ten pistoles, that were not clipped like those of the Bearnais.

'Come then, Monsieur Chicot,' said the page, 'it is plain you come from the court of France, you have manners to which we can refuse nothing; quit your chamber, then; but especially make no noise.'

Chicot did not wait to be told twice, he glided like a ghost into the corridor, and from the corridor to the staircase; but, arrived at the bottom of the peristyle, he found an officer of the palace sleeping in a chair.

This man secured the door by the very weight of his body; to attempt to pass would have been madness.

'Ah! you little brigand of a page,' murmured Chicot, 'you knew this, and did not warn me.'

To add to his misfortune, the officer appeared to sleep very lightly; he moved, with sudden and nervous shocks, at one time a leg, at another an arm; once even he extended his arm like a man about to wake up.

Chicot searched about him to discover some issue by which, thanks to his long legs and a strong hand, he might escape without going through the door.

At length he discovered what he sought for.

It was one of those arched windows called impost, which had remained open, either to allow the air to penetrate, or because the King of Navarre, a proprietor not over careful, had not judged it convenient to renew the glass.

Chicot recognised the wall by his fingers; he calculated by feeling every space contained between the projections, and made use of them, to rest his foot upon, like the steps of a ladder. At length he hoisted himself (our readers know his dexterity and agility) without making more noise than a dry leaf rustling against the wall from the breath of an autumn breeze.

But the impost had a disproportionate convexity, so much so that the ellipsis was not equal to that of the rotundity of Chicot's body and shoulders, although he *collapsed* his belly; and his shoulders, as supple as those of a cat, seemed to enjoin and bury themselves in the flesh to occupy less space.

The result was, that when Chicot had passed his head and shoulder, and left, by a foot, the projection of the wall, he found himself suspended between heaven and earth, without the power of advancing or returning.

He now commenced a series of efforts, the first of which resulted in a serious rent of his doublet, and a grievous wound in his skin.

What rendered his position more difficult was the sword, the handle of which would not pass, serving as a cramp inside, which held Chicot glued to the sash of the impost.

Chicot collected all his strength, all his patience, all his industry, to unfasten the agraffe of his sword belt, but it was precisely upon this agraffe that all the weight lay; he was forced to change the manœuvre, therefore. He succeeded in sliding his arm behind his back, and in drawing the sword from the sheath; the sword once drawn, it was less difficult to find, thanks to his angular body, an interstice through which he could pass the handle; the sword then fell the first on the flag stone, and Chicot, sliding through the opening like an eel, followed it, breaking his fall with his two hands.

The whole of this struggle of man against the iron teeth of the impost had not been executed without noise, so that Chicot, on rising, found himself face to face with a soldier.

'Ah, my God! have you injured yourself, Monsieur Chicot?' inquired the latter, presenting to him the point of his halberd, by way of a support.

'Another,' thought Chicot.

And thinking of the interest the man had shown towards him:—

'No, my friend,' he said, 'not at all.'

'Tis very lucky,' said the soldier; 'I defy any one to accomplish a similar feat, without breaking his head; indeed, none but you could have done it, Monsieur Chicot.'

'But how the devil did you know my name?' said Chicot, surprised, still attempting to pass him.

'I know it because I saw you at the palace to-day, and I asked, "Who is that gentleman, so tall, who is talking with the King?" "'Tis M. Chicot," they replied to me, and this is how I know it.'

'Tis very gallant,' said Chicot, 'but as I am much pressed, my friend, you will permit——'

'What, Monsieur Chicot ?'

'That I quit you, and go about my affairs.'

'But no one leaves the palace at night; I have a consign.'

'You see plainly that they leave, since I have left myself.'

'Tis one reason, I know well : but——'

'But ?'

'You will return, that's all, Monsieur Chicot.'

'Ah ! no.'

'How, no ?'

'Not that way at least, the road is too bad.'

'If I were an officer, instead of being a soldier, I should ask you why you left by that way; but it is no business of mine; but it is my business to see that you return. Return, therefore, Monsieur Chicot, I beg of you.'

And the soldier infused such an accent of persuasion in his prayer, that Chicot was moved.

Consequently Chicot again searched his pocket, and drew out ten pistoles.

'You are too good a manager, my friend, not to comprehend that when I have brought my clothes to this state, in passing through there, it would be much worse if I repassed; I should finish tearing my clothes, and become quite naked; that would be very indecent, in a court where there are so many young and pretty girls, commencing with the queen. Let me pass, then, to find a tailor, my friend.'

And he placed the ten pistoles in his hand.

'Pass quickly, then, Monsieur Chicot; pass quickly.'

And he pocketed the money.

Chicot was in the street; he considered where he was for a moment; he had passed through the town to arrive at the palace; he must follow the contrary road, as he intended to leave by the opposite gate to the one through which he had entered.

The night, clear and cloudless, was not favourable for an evasion. Chicot regretted those good misty nights of France, which, at this hour, allowed one, in the streets of Paris, to pass within a yard of another without being seen; besides, on the paving-stones of the town, his iron boots resounded like so many horseshoes.

The unfortunate ambassador had scarcely turned the corner of the street when he encountered a patrol.

He stopped of his own accord, considering it would have a suspicious look to attempt to dissemble or force a passage.

'Eh ! good night, Monsieur Chicot,' said the chief of the patrol, saluting him with his sword, 'do you wish us to reconduct you to the palace ? You appear to me to be lost, and to be seeking your way.'

'Ah ! ah ! every one knows me, then, here ?' murmured Chicot. 'Pardieu ! this is strange.'

Then in a louder tone, and in the most easy air he could assume :—

'No, cornet,' he said, 'you are mistaken; I am not going to the palace.'

'You are wrong, Monsieur Chicot,' gravely replied the officer.

'And why so, sir ?'

'Because a very severe edict forbids the inhabitants of Nerac to go out at night, unless upon urgent necessity, without permission, and without a lantern.'

'Excuse me, sir,' said Chicot, 'but the edict cannot affect me.'

'And why so ?'

'I am not one of Nerac.'

'Yes, but you are at Nerac; inhabiting does not mean one of—inhabiting means residing at; now you will not deny that you reside at Nerac, since I encounter you in the streets of Nerac.'

'You are logical, sir; unfortunately I am pressed. Allow a slight infraction of your consign, and permit me to pass, I beg of you.'

'You will lose yourself, Monsieur Chicot; Nerac is a tortuous town, you will fall into some stinking hole; you require to be guided; allow three of my men to conduct you to the palace.'

'But I am not going to the palace, I tell you.'

'Where are you going, then ?'

'I cannot sleep to-night, and so I am taking a walk. Nerac is a charming town, full of antiquities, as it appears to me; I wish to observe it, study it.'

'They shall conduct you wherever you like, Monsieur Chicot ! Hallo ! three men !'

'I entreat you, sir, not to deprive me of the picturesque of my promenade; I like to walk alone.'

'You will be assassinated by robbers.'

'I have my sword.'

'Ah! true, I had not seen it; you will be arrested then by the provost for being armed.'

Chicot saw there were no means of getting out of it by subtleties: he took the officer aside.

'Come, sir,' said he, 'you are young and handsome; you know what an imperious tyrant love is.'

'Undoubtedly, sir, undoubtedly.'

'Well, sir, love is consuming me, cornet. I have to visit a certain lady.'

'Where?'

'In a certain quarter.'

'Young?'

'Twenty-three.'

'Handsome?'

'As the Loves.'

'I compliment you, sir.'

'Well! you will allow me to pass now?'

'Damn! there is urgency, as it appears.'

'Urgency, that is the word, sir.'

'Pass, then.'

'But alone, eh? you feel that I cannot compromise?'

'How then! pass, Monsieur Chicot, pass.'

'You are a gallant man, cornet.'

'Sir!'

'No; ventre de biche! 'tis a good trait. But here, how did you know me?'

'I have seen you at the palace with the King.'

'Such are these little towns!' thought Chicot; 'if I were known at Paris like this, how many times I should have had my skin pierced, instead of my doublet!'

And he squeezed the hand of the young officer, who said to him:—

'Which way do you go?'

'Towards the gate of Agen.'

'Do not wander from it, mind.'

'Am I not in the road?'

'Certainly, continue straight, and no misadventure; this is my wish for you.'

'Thank you.'

And Chicot departed as quickly, and as joyful, as possible.

He had not gone a hundred steps when he found himself face to face with the watch.

'Mordieu ! what a well-guarded town,' thought Chicot. 'No one passes !' cried the provost, in a voice of thunder.

'But, sir,' objected Chicot, 'I should wish, however——'

'Ah ! Monsieur Chicot ! 'tis you; how is it you are in the street in such cold weather ?' demanded the magisterial officer.

'Ah ! decidedly, 'tis a wager,' thought Chicot, very uneasy. And bowing, he made a movement to continue his road.

'Monsieur Chicot, take care,' said the provost.

'Beware of what, monsieur the magistrate ?'

'You mistake the road; you are going towards the gates.'

'Exactly so.'

'Then I shall arrest you, Monsieur Chicot.'

'No, monsieur the provost; plague ! you would strike a grand blow.'

'And yet ?'

'Approach, monsieur the provost, and let not your soldiers hear what we are going to say.'

The provost approached.

'I am listening,' he said.

'The King has given me a commission for the lieutenant of the gate of Agen.'

'Ah ! ah !' said the provost, with an air of surprise.

'This astonishes you ?'

'Yes.'

'It ought not to astonish you, however, since you know me.'

'I know you from having seen you at the palace with the King.'

Chicot stamped with his foot : impatience began to seize him.

'That ought to suffice to prove to you that I have the confidence of His Majesty.'

'No doubt, no doubt : go and fulfil the commission of the King, Monsieur Chicot. I do not arrest you.'

'Tis droll, but pleasant,' thought Chicot; 'I delay my journey, but still I advance; ventre de biche ! here is a gate, it must be that of Agen; in five minutes I shall be outside.'

He arrived, in fact, at the door, guarded by a sentinel, who marched up and down, with a musket on his shoulder.

'Pardon, my friend,' said Chicot, 'will you order them to open the door to me?'

'I do not order, Monsieur Chicot,' replied the sentinel humbly, 'seeing that I am only a private.'

'You know me also?' exclaimed Chicot, exasperated.

'I have that honour, Monsieur Chicot; I was this morning the guard of the palace, I saw you conversing with the King.'

'Well! my friend, since you know me, learn one thing.'

'Which?'

'That the King has given me a very pressing message for Agen; therefore, just open the postern to me.'

'I would do so with great pleasure, Monsieur Chicot, but I have not the keys.'

'And who has them?'

'The officer on service.'

Chicot sighed.

'And where is the officer on service?' he inquired.

'Oh! don't disturb yourself about that.'

The soldier rang a bell, that awakened in his post the sleeping officer.

'What's the matter?' demanded the latter, passing his head through the little window.

'Lieutenant, 'tis a gentleman who desires the door to be opened, that he may pass.'

'Oh! Monsieur Chicot,' exclaimed the officer, 'pardon; afflicted at keeping you waiting, excuse me, I am yours, I am coming down.'

Chicot bit his nails by way of commencing his rage.

'But shall I not find one who does not know me? why this Nerac is a lantern, and I'm the candle!'

The officer appeared at the door.

'Excuse me, Monsieur Chicot,' he said advancing hastily, 'but I was asleep.'

'Well! sir,' said Chicot, 'the night is made for that; will you be good enough to have the door opened for me? I, myself, do not sleep, unfortunately. The King—you are no doubt also aware that the King knows me?'

'I saw you to-day conversing with His Majesty at the palace.'

'Exactly so,' grumbled Chicot; 'well, if you saw me conversing with the King you did not hear me conversing with him, at any rate.'

'No, Monsieur Chicot, I only say what I know.'

'And I also; now the King, in conversing with me to-day, commanded me to go to-night to Agen with a commission; now, this gate is the gate of Agen, is it not?'

'Yes, Monsieur Chicot.'

'It is closed?'

'As you see.'

'Will you have the goodness to order it to be opened, then.'

'How, Monsieur Chicot? here Anthenas, Anthenas, open the gate for M. Chicot, quick, quick, quick!'

Chicot opened his large eyes, and breathed like a diver who issues from the water after five minutes' immersion.

The gate creaked on its hinges—the gate of Paradise for poor Chicot, who saw beyond this gate all the delights of liberty.

He cordially saluted the officer, and marched towards the vaulted roof.

'Adieu,' he said, 'thank you.'

'Adieu, Monsieur Chicot; a pleasant journey!'

And Chicot made another step towards the door.

'A propos, what a fool I am,' cried the officer, running after Chicot, and retaining him by the sleeve; 'I forgot, dear Monsieur Chicot, to ask you for your pass.'

'How! my pass?'

'Certainly, you are a man of the sword, Monsieur Chicot, and you know what a pass is, don't you? no one leaves, you understand, a town like Nerac without the King's pass, especially when the King inhabits it.'

'And by whom ought this pass to be signed?'

'By the King himself. So, since it is the King who sends you away, he will not have forgotten to give you a pass.'

'Ah! ah! do you doubt, then, that the King send me,' said Chicot, his eye on fire, for he saw himself on the point of failing; and fury suggested to him the evil thought of killing the officer and the porter, and to fly through the opened passage, at the risk of being pursued in his flight by a hundred arquebuses.

'I doubt nothing, Monsieur Chicot, especially what you do me the honour to tell me; but reflect that if the King has given you this commission——'

'In person, sir, in person!'

'The greater reason, His Majesty knows then that you are about to leave——'

'Ventre de biche !' exclaimed Chicot, 'I know well that he is aware of it.'

'Then I shall have a card of leave to hand to-morrow morning to M. the governor of the place.'

'And the governor of the place,' said Chicot, 'is——'

'M. de Mornay, who never trifles with consigns, Monsieur Chicot; you ought to know that, and who would send me to a court-martial, purely and simply if I failed in mine.'

Chicot began to play with the guard of his sword, with a wicked smile, when, turning round, he observed that the gate was obstructed by an exterior patrol, who were there just to prevent Chicot from passing, had he killed the lieutenant, the sentinel, and the porter.

'Well !' said Chicot to himself, with a sigh, 'twas well played, I am a fool, I have lost.'

And he turned on his heel.

'Do you wish them to reconduct you, Monsieur Chicot ?' demanded the officer.

'Tis not worth while, thank you,' replied Chicot.

Chicot turned back, but his martyrdom was not over. He encountered the provost, who said to him :—

'Why, Monsieur Chicot, you have already done your commission then ? peste ! 'tis soon done with you, you are quick.'

Further on, the cornet seized upon him at the corner of the street, and said :—

'Good-night, Monsieur Chicot. Well ! the lady, you know ! are you satisfied with Nerac, Monsieur Chicot ?'

Lastly, the soldier of the peristyle, still a sentinel at the same place, gave him a last broadside :—

'Cordieu, Monsieur Chicot,' he said to him, 'the tailor has not very well mended you; and you are, God forgive me ! more in rags than on leaving.'

Chicot would not risk being skinned like a hare, by again passing through the iron-defended impost; he lay down before the door, and feigned to be asleep.

By chance, or rather by charity, the door was opened, and Chicot re-entered, abashed and humbled, the palace.

His wild appearance touched the page, still at his post.

'Dear Monsieur Chicot,' he said to him, 'should you wish me to give you the key of all this ?'

'Give, serpent, give,' murmured Chicot.

'Well! the King is so fond of you, that he has determined to keep you.'

'And you knew it, you little brigand, and did not apprise me of it!'

'Ah! Monsieur Chicot, impossible, it was a state secret.'

'But I paid you, scelerat!'

'Ah! the secret was worth more than ten pistoles; you will acknowledge it, Monsieur Chicot.'

Chicot returned to his chamber, and fell asleep with rage.

CHAPTER LII

THE GRAND HUNTSMAN OF THE KING OF NAVARRE

ON quitting the King, Margaret of Navarre immediately repaired to the apartment of the maids of honour.

On her way, she took with her her physician Chirac, who slept at the château, and entered with him the chamber of the poor Fosseuse, who, pale, and surrounded with the eyes of the curious, complained of pains in her stomach, without, so great was her anguish, replying to any question or accepting any consolation.

Fosseuse was, at this period, twenty or twenty-one years of age; she had a tall and handsome person, with blue eyes, fair hair, a figure supple and full of softness and grace; but for the last three months she had not gone out, and complained of a lassitude which prevented her getting up. She reclined on a long chair, and from the long chair, had finished by taking to her bed.

Chirac commenced by dismissing those present, and taking possession of the bedside of the patient, he remained alone with her and the Queen.

Fosseuse, frightened at these preliminaries, to which the two physiognomies of Chirac and the Queen, the one impassible, the other frozen, did not fail to give a certain solemnity: Fosseuse, we say, raised herself on her pillow, and stammered out her thanks for the honour the Queen her mistress did her.

Margaret was more pale than Fosseuse; for wounded pride is more painful than cruelty or illness.

Chirac felt the pulse of the young girl, but almost against her will.

'What do you feel?' he inquired of her, after a moment's examination.

'Pains in my stomach, sir,' replied the poor child; 'but it will be nothing, I assure you; and if I had but quietness.'

'What quietness, mademoiselle?' inquired the Queen. Fosseuse burst into tears.

'Do not afflict yourself, mademoiselle,' continued Margaret; 'His Majesty has begged me to visit you, to keep up your spirits.'

'Oh! what kindness, madame!'

Chirac dropped the hand of Fosseuse.

'And now,' he said, 'I know what your illness is.'

'You know?' said Fosseuse, trembling.

'Yes, we know that you must suffer much,' added Margaret.

Fosseuse continued to frighten herself, at being thus at the mercy of two impassibilities, that of science, and that of jealousy.

Margaret made a sign to Chirac, who quitted the chamber. The alarm of Fosseuse now became a trembling; she nearly fainted.

'Mademoiselle,' said Margaret, 'although for some time you act towards me as to a stranger, and though they apprise me every day of the untoward offices you render me with my husband——'

'I! madame?'

'Do not interrupt me, I beg; although you have aspired to a position much beyond your ambitions, the friendship I have for you, and that I have sworn to the honourable persons to whom you belong, urges me to succour you in the misfortunes in which you find yourself at this moment.'

'Madame, I swear to you——'

'Do not deny; I have already too many troubles: do not ruin in honour, yourself first, and me afterwards; I, who have almost as much interest as yourself in your honour, since you belong to me, mademoiselle; tell me all, and in this I will serve you as a mother.'

'Oh! madame! madame! do you believe what they say, then?'

Beware of interrupting me, mademoiselle; for, as it

appears to me, time presses. I would say to you, that at this moment, M. Chirac, who knows your illness, you remember the words he said to you just now; that at this moment, M. Chirac is in the antechambers, where he announces to all, that the contagious malady which the country speaks of is in the palace, and that you are threatened with an attack of it. However, if it is yet time, I will take you to Mas d'Aginois, which is a house very distant from the King, my husband. We shall be there alone, or nearly so; the King, on his part, starts with his suite for a hunt, which he says will detain him away for several days; we will not leave Mas d'Aginois until after your deliverance.'

'Madame ! madame !' exclaimed la Fosseuse, purple with shame and anguish, 'if you put faith in all that is said on my account, leave me to die miserably.'

'You receive my generosity unkindly, mademoiselle, and you reckon too much on the friendship of the King, who has begged me not to abandon you.'

'The King ?—the King has said——'

'Do you doubt it, when I have spoken, mademoiselle ? If I did not see the symptoms of your real illness, if I did not divine, from your sufferings, that the crisis approaches, I might perhaps have placed some faith in your denial.'

At this moment, as if to prove the words of the Queen, the poor Fosseuse, vanquished by the pains of her situation, fell back, livid and palpitating, on her pillow.

Margaret regarded her for some time without anger, but also without pity.

'Must I still believe in your denials, mademoiselle ?' she at length said to the poor girl, when the latter was enabled to raise herself, and in rising showed a countenance so deranged, and so bathed in tears, that it would have melted Catherine herself.

At this moment—and as if Providence had determined to send help to the unhappy child—the door opened, and the King of Navarre hastily entered.

Henry, who had not the same reasons for sleeping as Chicot, had not slept. After having worked an hour with Mornay—and having, during this hour, arranged all dispositions for the hunt, so pompously announced to Chicot—he had repaired to the pavilion of the maids of honour.

'Well ! what do they say ?' he said, on entering, 'that my child Fosseuse is still suffering ?'

'Do you see, madame,' exclaimed the young girl at the sight of her lover, and rendered stronger by the assistance that had arrived for her, 'do you see that the King has said nothing, and that I do right to deny?'

'Monsieur,' said the Queen, turning towards Henry, 'let this humiliating struggle cease, I beg of you; I think I have understood as much, that your Majesty had honoured me with your confidence, and revealed the state of mademoiselle. Apprise her then, that I am informed of all, that she may no longer doubt when I affirm——'

'My child,' said Henry, with a tenderness which he did not even attempt to conceal, 'you persist then in denying?'

'The secret does not belong to me, sire,' replied the courageous child, 'and until I have received from your mouth, the permission to tell the whole——'

'My child Fosseuse has a brave heart, madame,' replied Henry; 'pardon her, I entreat you; and you, my child, place every confidence in the kindness of your Queen; the acknowledgment is my affair, and I take charge of it.'

And Henry took the hand of Margaret, and pressed it warmly.

At this moment, a fresh access of the pains again assailed the young girl: she yielded a second time to the tempest, and bowed like a lily, she dropped her head with a painful and hollow groan.

Henry was touched to his inmost heart when he saw the pale brow, the swimming eyes, the humid and scattered hair; when he at length saw, resting on the temples and lips of Fosseuse, that sweat of anguish, like pearls, which seemed next to agony.

He hastened towards her, overcome, and with open arms.

'Fosseuse! dear Fosseuse!' he murmured, falling on his knees before her bed.

Margaret, gloomy and silent, glued her burning forehead to the glass of the window.

Fosseuse had the strength to raise her arms, and pass them round the neck of her lover; she then approached her lips to his, thinking she was about to die, and that in this last, this supreme kiss she gave to Henry her soul and her adieu.

She then fell back insensible.

Henry as pale as herself, as feeble and voiceless at

herself, let his head-drop on the sheet of her bed of agony, which appeared so likely to become a shroud.

Margaret approached the group, in which were blended physical anguish and moral anguish.

'Rise, sir, and allow me to accomplish the duty you have imposed upon me,' she said, with a majestic energy.

And as Henry seemed uneasy at this manifestation, and half raised himself on his knee :—

'Oh ! fear nothing, sir,' she said, 'when my pride alone is wounded, I am strong ! against my heart, I would not have answered for myself, but happily, my heart is not concerned here.'

Henry raised his head.

'Madame ?' he said.

'Add not a word, sir,' said Margaret, presenting her hand, 'or I shall believe that your indulgence has been a calculation. We are brother and sister, we shall understand each other.'

Henry led her to Fosseuse, whose chilly hand he placed in the feverish hand of Margaret.

'Leave, sire, leave,' said the Queen, 'depart for the chase. At present the more of your household you carry with you, the more you will remove the eyes of the curious from the bed of—mademoiselle.'

'But,' said Henry, 'I saw no one in the antechambers.'

'No, sire,' replied Margaret, smiling, 'they think the fever is here; hasten therefore to take your pleasure elsewhere.'

'Madame,' said Henry, 'I go, and shall hunt for both of us.'

And he fixed a tender and last regard on Fosseuse, still in a swoon, and rushed from the apartment.

On gaining the antechamber he shook his head, as if to drive away all remains of inquietude; and with a smiling countenance, so peculiar to himself, he ascended to Chicot's room, who, as we have said, slept with closed hands.

The King opened the door, and shaking the sleeper in his bed :—

'Eh, eh ! neighbour,' said he, 'quick, quick, it is two o'clock in the morning.'

'Ah, the devil !' said Chicot, 'you call me neighbour, sire. Do you take me for the Duke of Guise, by any chance ?'

In fact, Henry, when he spoke of the Duke de Guise, had a habit of calling him his neighbour.

'I take you for my friend,' he said.

'And you make me a prisoner, I an ambassador! sire, you violate the rights of men.'

Henry commenced laughing. Chicot, a man of spirit above all, could not prevent himself keeping him company.

'You are mad. Why the devil did you wish to leave this? Were you not well treated?'

'Too well, ventre de biche! too well; I seem to be here like a goose fattening in the poultry yard. Every one says to me, "Petit, petit, Chicot, how genteel he is!" but they clip my wing, they close the door against me.'

'Chicot, my child,' said Henry, shaking his head, 'reassure yourself, you are not quite fat enough for my table.'

'Eh! but sire,' said Chicot, rising, 'I find you quite gay this morning; what news then?'

'Ah! I will tell you; 'tis that I start for the chase you see, and I am always very gay when I am going to hunt. Come, out of bed, neighbour, out of bed.'

'How! you take me, sire?'

'You shall be my historiographer, Chicot.'

'I will keep account of coups fired?'

'Exactly.'

Chicot shook his head.

'Well, what is the matter?' inquired the King.

'It is,' replied Chicot, 'that I have never seen such gaiety without uneasiness.'

'Bah!'

'Yes, 'tis like the sun when it——'

'Well?'

'Well, sire, rains—thunder and lightning are not far off.'

Henry caressed his beard, smiling, and replied:—

'If it comes to a storm, Chicot, my cloak is large, and you will be sheltered.'

And advancing towards the antechamber, whilst Chicot dressed himself, murmuring.

'My horse,' cried the King; 'and let them apprise M. de Mornay that I am ready.'

'Ah! 'tis M. de Mornay who is grand huntsman for this chase?' said Chicot.

'M. de Mornay is everything here,' replied Henry. 'The King of Navarre is so poor, that he has not the means of dividing his charges into specialities, I have but one man.'

'Yes, but he is good,' sighed Chicot.

CHAPTER LIII

HOW THEY HUNT THE WOLF IN NAVARRE

CHICOT, on casting his eyes on the preparations for departure, could not help remarking, in a half whisper, that the hunting of the King of Navarre was less sumptuous than that of the King of France.

Twelve or fifteen gentlemen only, among whom was recognised M. the Viscount of Turenne, the object of the matrimonial contests, formed the whole suite of His Majesty.

Moreover, as these gentlemen were but apparently rich, as their revenues were not powerful enough to incur useless and even, sometimes, necessary expenses, nearly all, in lieu of the hunting costume in use at this period, wore the helmet and cuirass; which induced Chicot to inquire, if the wolves of Gascony had in their forests muskets and artillery.

Henry listened to the question, although it was not directly addressed to him; he approached Chicot, and touched him on the shoulder :—

'No, my son,' he said, 'the wolves of Gascony have neither muskets nor artillery; but they are roughish brutes, who have claws and teeth, and who entice the hunters into the woods, where they run a great risk of tearing their clothes with the thorns; now a garment of silk or velvet, or even a surcoat of cloth or leather, is soon torn; but a cuirass is not so easily damaged.'

'This is a reason,' grumbled Chicot, 'but it is not an excellent one.'

'What would you ?' said Henry; 'I have no other.'

'I must be content, then.'

'Tis the best you can do, my son.'

'Be it so.'

'That *Be it so*, smells like an interior critique,' said

Henry, smiling; 'you are vexed with me for having deranged you to go to the hunt ?'

'My faith, yes.'

'And you censure ?'

'Is it prohibited ?'

'No, my friend, no; censure is the small change of Gascony.'

'You comprehend, sire; I am no hunter, myself,' replied Chicot, 'and I must certainly occupy myself about something. I am a poor idler, with nothing to do, whilst you others indulge your moustaches with the flavour of those nice wolves you are going to hunt—a dozen or fifteen of you.'

'Ah ! yes,' said the King, again smiling satirically, 'the clothes first, then the number; rail, rail, my dear Chicot.'

'Ah, sire !'

'But I shall observe to you that you are not indulgent, my son. Bearn is not as large as France. The King there always proceeds with two hundred huntsmen: I, here, start with a dozen, as you see.'

'Yes, sire.'

'But,' continued Henry, 'you will believe that I am Gasconing, Chicot. Well, here sometimes, which does not happen yonder, country gentlemen, learning that I am going to hunt, quit their houses, their châteaux, and join me, which at times collects for me a very tolerable escort.'

'You see, sire, that I shall not have the honour of assisting in such an affair,' said Chicot, 'I am in ill luck.'

'Who knows ?' replied Henry, with his bantering smile.

'Why, as they had left Nerac, and cleared the gates of the town, as for the last half hour nearly, they have been in the country——'

'Stay,' said Henry to Chicot, raising his hand over his eyes, to see the clearer, 'stay, I am not mistaken, I think.'

'What is it ?' demanded Chicot.

'Look then, yonder, towards the barriers of the suburb of Morlas; are they not cavaliers I perceive ?'

Chicot rose in his stirrups.

'My faith, I think they are, sire,' he said.

'And I am quite sure of it.'

'Cavaliers, yes,' said Chicot, looking with more attention; 'but huntsmen, no.'

'Why not huntsmen ?'

'Because they are armed like the Rolands and Amadis,' replied Chicot.

'Eh, what matters the dress, my dear Chicot? you have already learnt, on seeing us, that the dress does not make the huntsman.'

'But,' exclaimed Chicot, 'I see at least two hundred men, yonder.'

'Well, what does that prove, my son? that Morlas renders good service.'

Chicot felt his curiosity sharpened more and more.

The troop that Chicot had numbered at the lowest figure, for it was composed of two hundred and fifty horsemen, joined itself silently to the escort; each of the men that composed it was well mounted, well equipped, and the whole was commanded by a good-looking man, who kissed the hand of Henry with courtesy and attachment.

They passed the Gers by a ford; between the Gers and the Garonne, in a hollow ground, they found a second troop of a hundred men; the chief approached Henry, and appeared to be excusing himself, for not bringing a larger number of hunters. Henry received his excuses, and presented him his hand.

They continued their march, and reached the Garonne; as they had crossed the Gers, so they crossed the Garonne; but as the Garonne was deeper than the Gers, at two-thirds of the river they lost their footing, and were compelled to swim for a space of thirty or forty yards; however, against all obstacles, they reached the other side without accident.

'Tudieu,' said Chicot, 'what exercises you make, sire? When you have bridges above and below Agen, you dip your cuirasses in the water like that?'

'My dear Chicot,' said Henry, 'we are savages; you must pardon us, therefore; you well know that my late brother Charles called me his wild boar; now the boar, but you are no hunter, Chicot; you are not aware of this; now the wild boar never disturbs himself; he goes straight on his way; I imitate him, bearing his name; I never go out of my way. A river presents itself, I go through it; a town rises up before me, ventre Saint Gris, I eat it like a pie.'

This pleasantry of the Bearnais raised a loud shout of laughter round him.

M. de Mornay alone, always at the side of the King, did not laugh aloud; he contented himself to pinch in his lips, which, with him, was the sign of extravagant hilarity.

'Mornay is in a very good humour to-day,' said the Bearnais gaily, in the ear of Chicot, 'he laughs at my facetiousness.'

Chicot asked himself at which of the two he ought to laugh; at the master, so happy at making his servitor laugh, or at the servitor, so difficult to make merry.

But above all, astonishment remained deepest in the ideas of Chicot.

On the other side of the Garonne, about half a league from the river, nearly three hundred cavaliers, concealed in a pine forest, appeared before the eyes of Chicot.

'Oh! oh! monseigneur,' he said quietly to Henry, 'are these men jealous at hearing of your hunt, and have they not an intention of opposing you?'

'No,' said Henry, 'and you are again mistaken this time, my son, these men are friends who come from Puymirol, hearty friends.'

'Tudieu, sire, why you will have more friends in your suite than you will find trees in the forest.'

'Chicot, my friend,' said Henry, 'I think, God forgive me, that the noise of your arrival has spread throughout the country, and that these men run from the four corners of the province to do honour to the King of France, whose ambassador you are.'

Chicot had too much sense not to perceive that for some time past he had become their jest.

He took it quietly, but not in bad humour.

The journey finished at Monroy, where the gentlemen of the country assembled, as if apprised beforehand that the King of Navarre was to pass, offered him a handsome supper, of which Chicot partook with enthusiasm, seeing that they had not thought fit to stop on the way, for a matter so little important as a meal, and that, in consequence, they had not eaten since leaving Nerac.

They had prepared for Henry the best house in the town, half the troop reclined themselves in the street in which the King stopped, the other outside the gate.

'When shall we commence the hunt?' inquired Chicot of Henry, at the moment the latter was being unbooted.

'We are not yet in the territory of the wolves, my dear Chicot,' said Henry.

'And when shall we be there, sire?' said Chicot.

'Curious!'

'No, sire; but you comprehend, we like to know where we are going.'

'You will know it to-morrow, my son; in the meantime lie down there, on the cushions to my left; stay, here is Mornay already snoring on my right.'

'Peste!' said Chicot, 'his sleep is noisier than last night.'

'Yes, it's true,' said Henry, 'he is no boaster, but 'tis at the chase you must see him, and you shall see him.'

The day had scarcely broken, when a great noise of horses awoke Chicot and the King.

An old gentleman, who would serve the King himself, brought Henry the honey tart and the spiced wine of the morning.

Mornay and Chicot were served by the domestics of the old gentleman.

The repast concluded, they sounded for saddling.

'Come, come,' said Henry, 'we have a good journey to make to-day; to horse, gentlemen, to horse.'

Chicot observed with astonishment that five hundred cavaliers were added to the escort.

These five hundred horsemen had arrived during the night.

'Ah, ça! why this is not a suite you have, sire; 'tis no longer a troop, 'tis an army.'

Henry only replied in three words.

'Wait further, wait.'

At Lauzerte, six hundred men, on foot, ranged themselves behind the troop of horsemen.

'Foot soldiers!' exclaimed Chicot, 'infantry!'

'Beaters,' said the King, 'nothing more than beaters.'

Chicot knit his brows, and from this moment spoke no more.

Twenty times his eyes turned towards the country, that is, that twenty times the idea of flying crossed his mind. But Chicot had his guard of honour, no doubt as being the representative of the King of France.

It resulted, that Chicot was so well recommended to this guard, as a personage of the highest importance,

that he made not a gesture without this gesture being repeated by a dozen men.

This displeased him, and he told the King as much in two words.

'Well,' replied Henry to him, ' 'tis your own fault, my child; you tried to escape from Nerac, and I am afraid you wish to escape now.'

'Sire,' replied Chicot, 'I pledge you my word as a gentleman, that I will not even attempt it.'

'Very well.'

'Besides, I should do wrong.'

'You would do wrong?'

'Yes, for by remaining I am destined, I think, to see some curious things.'

'Well! I am glad this is your opinion, my dear Chicot, for 'tis also mine.'

They were now passing through the town of Monteuq, and four small country pieces took their stations in the army.

'I return to my first idea, sire,' said Chicot, 'that the wolves of this country, are master wolves, and that they are treated with attentions unknown to ordinary wolves; artillery for them, sire!'

'Ah! you have remarked,' said Henry, "'tis a whim of the men of Monteuq, since I gave them, for their exercises, these four pieces, which I had purchased in Spain, and which were smuggled over, they draw them everywhere.'

'Well, shall we arrive to-day, sire?'

'No, to-morrow.'

'To-morrow morning, or to-morrow night?'

'To-morrow morning.'

'Then,' said Chicot, "'tis at Cahors that we hunt; is it not, sire?'

'It is near there,' said the King.

'But why, sire, have you, who possess infantry, cavalry, and artillery, to hunt the wolf, why have you forgotten to take the royal standard? The honour you do these worthy animals would have been complete.'

'They have not forgotten it, Chicot, ventre Saint Gris! they have taken care of it; but they have left it in the case that it may not be soiled. But since you wish for a standard, my child, to know under what banner you march, you shall see a handsome one. Draw the standard

from its case,' commanded the King, 'M. Chicot desires to know how the arms of Navarre are blazoned.'

'No, no, 'tis useless,' said Chicot, 'another time; leave it where it is, it is well off.'

'Then be quiet,' said the King; 'you shall see it at the proper time and place.'

The second night was passed at Cahors, in nearly the same way as they had passed the first; from the moment Chicot had pledged his word of honour not to escape, there was no more annoying attention paid to him.

He made a tour through the village, and rode as far as the advanced posts, on all sides troops of one hundred, five hundred, seven hundred men arrived to join the army. This night was the rendezvous of the infantry.

'It is very lucky we are not going as far as Paris,' said Chicot, 'we should arrive there with a hundred thousand men.'

The next morning, at eight o'clock, they came in sight of Cahors, with a thousand men on foot, and two thousand cavalry.

They found the town defended; those on the look-out had alarmed the country; M. de Vezin had immediately taken precautions.

'Ah, ah!' said the King, to whom Mornay communicated this news, 'we are anticipated; 'tis a little annoying.'

'We must regularly besiege it, sire,' said Mornay; 'we still expect nearly two thousand men, 'tis as many as we require to balance the chances, at least.'

'Let us assemble the council,' said M. de Turenne, 'and commence the trenches.'

Chicot observed everything, and listened to all, with an air of astonishment.

The thoughtful and almost unhappy mien of the King of Navarre, confirmed him in his suspicions that Henry was but a poor soldier, and this conviction alone tranquillised him.

Henry had allowed every one to speak, and during the enunciation of different opinions, he had remained as silent as a fish.

Suddenly he awoke from his reverie, raised his head, and in a tone of command :—

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'this is what we must do; we have

three thousand men, and two thousand expected, you say, Mornay ?'

'Yes, sire.'

'This will make five thousand in all; in a regular siege, we shall lose a thousand, or fifteen hundred in two months; the death of these will discourage the others; we shall be obliged to raise the siege and beat a retreat; in beating a retreat, we shall lose another thousand, this will be the half of our forces; let us sacrifice five hundred men at once, and take Cahors.'

'How do you intend that, sire ?' said Mornay.

'My dear friend, we will go straight to the gate which is nearest to us. We shall find a ditch on our route; we will fill it with fascines; we shall leave two hundred men on the ground, but we shall get possession of the gate.'

'And afterwards, sire ?'

'After the gate is attained, we will blow it up with petards, and they will find their lodging in it. This is not an affair of difficulty.'

Chicot, amazed, looked at Henry.

'Yes,' he grumbled, 'coward and boaster, here is really my Gascon; is it yourself, speak, who will place the petard under the door ?'

At the very moment, as though he had heard this sentiment of Chicot, Henry added :—

'Let us lose no time, gentlemen, the viands cool; let us forward, and those who love me, follow me.'

Chicot approached Mornay, to whom he had had no time, during the whole journey, to address a single word.

'Tell me, then, Monsieur the Count,' he whispered into his ear, 'is it that you have a mind to be all cut up ?'

'Monsieur Chicot, it is necessary to put ourselves well in training,' tranquilly replied Mornay.

'But your king will be killed !'

'Bah ! His Majesty has a good cuirass !'

'Besides,' said Chicot, 'he is not such a fool as to mix in the fight, I presume ?'

Mornay shrugged his shoulders, and turned upon his heel from Chicot.

'Well,' said Chicot, 'I like him much better asleep than awake, when he snores than when he speaks; he is more polished.'

CHAPTER LIV

HOW HENRY OF NAVARRE CONDUCTED HIMSELF
THE FIRST TIME HE SAW FIRE

THE little army advanced within two cannon shots of the town : here they breakfasted.

The repast finished, two hours were allowed to the officers and soldiers to repose themselves.

It was three o'clock in the afternoon, that is, there remained scarcely two hours of daylight, when the King had the officers summoned to his tent.

Henry was very pale, and whilst he gesticulated, his hands trembled so visibly, that their fingers dropped like gloves hung out to dry.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'we are come to take Cahors; we must therefore take Cahors, since we are come for that; but we must take Cahors by force; by force, you understand ? that means, by burying steel and iron in the flesh.'

'Not bad,' said Chicot, who listened to the discourse as a critic, 'and if the action does not belie the word, we could demand no more, even from M. de Crillon.'

'M. the Marshal de Biron,' continued Henry, 'M. the Marshal de Biron, who has sworn to hang the last Huguenot, holds the country at forty-five leagues from hence. A messenger, in all probability, has been already despatched to him by M. de Vezin; in four or five days he will be on our backs : he has ten thousand men with him; we shall be taken between him and the town. Let us have taken Cahors then, before he arrives, and we will receive him as M. de Vezin has prepared to receive us, but with a better fortune, I hope; in the contrary event, at least, he will have stronger Catholic beams on which to hang the Huguenots, and we shall owe him this satisfaction. Come, forwards, forwards, gentlemen ! I shall place myself at your head, and shots, ventre Saint Gris, shots as thick as hailstones.'

This was the whole of the royal charge, but it was apparently sufficient, for the soldiers responded to it with enthusiastic murmurs, and the officers by the loudest bravos.

'Good speaker, still Gascon,' said Chicot aside; 'how lucky it is people do not speak with their hands ! Ventre

de biche ! the Bearnais would have stammered but roughly; besides, we shall see him at work.'

The little army departed, on the command of Mornay, to take up its position.

The moment it moved away to commence its march, the King approached Chicot.

'Pardon me, friend Chicot,' he said to him; 'I have deceived you in talking of a hunt, wolves, and other trifles; but decidedly I owed it to him, and 'tis your own opinion, as you have told me so in every letter; decidedly King Henry will not pay me the dower of his sister Margaret, and Margaret is crying out, Margaret is weeping to have her dear Cahors. We must do what the women wish, to have peace in the household; I shall attempt, therefore, to take Cahors, my dear Chicot.'

'Why did she not ask you for the moon, sire, since you are so complying a husband ?' replied Chicot, piqued at the royal pleasantries.

'I would have attempted it, Chicot,' said the Bearnais, 'I love her so much, that dear Margaret !'

'Ah, you have quite enough of Cahors, and we shall see how you will get yourself out of it.'

'Ah, that is just what I would arrive at ! listen, friend Chicot, the moment is supreme, and above all disagreeable. Ah, I am but a novice at the sword; I am not brave, and nature revolts in me at every arquebusade; Chicot, my friend, do not laugh too much at the poor Bearnais, your countryman and your friend; if I show fear and you observe it, do not mention it.'

'If you are afraid, you say ?'

'Yes.'

'You are afraid then of being afraid ?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'But then, ventre de biche ! if this is your nature, why the devil do you poke yourself into all these affairs ?'

'Because I must.'

'M. de Vezin is a terrible man !'

'I know it well, cordieu !'

'Who gives no one quarter !'

'You think so, Chicot ?'

'Oh ! I am sure of it; on that score, red feather or white feather matters little to him; he will cry to the cannons "Fire !"'

'You mean that for my white plume, Chicot ?'

'Yes, sire, and as you are the only one who has one of this colour——'

'Well?'

'I advise you to take it off, sire.'

'But, my friend, as I wear it that I may be recognised; if I take it off——'

'Well?'

'Well! my object will fail, Chicot.'

'You retain it then, notwithstanding my advice, sire?'

'Yes, decidedly I retain it.'

And in pronouncing these words, which indicated a resolution not to be shaken, Henry trembled more visibly than in haranguing his officers.

'Well,' said Chicot, who understood nothing of this double manifestation so different in words and actions, 'well there is time yet, sire; do not commit a folly, you cannot mount a horse in that state.'

'I am very pale then, Chicot?' demanded the King.

'Pale as a corpse, sire.'

'Good!' said the King.

'How good?'

'Yes, I understand myself.'

At this moment, the noise of the cannon of the place, accompanied by a furious charge of musketry, was heard; it was M. de Vezin who replied to the summons to yield himself, addressed to him by Duplessis Mornay.

'Heim!' said Chicot; 'what think you of this music?'

'I think it makes me devilish cold, even to the very marrow of my bones,' replied Henry. 'Come, my horse, my horse,' he cried, in a hesitating and brittle voice, like the spring of a clock.

Chicot regarded him, and listened to him without comprehending anything of the strange phenomenon developed under his eyes.

Henry put himself in the saddle, but he turned in it twice.

'Come, Chicot,' he said, 'in the saddle as well; you are not much of a soldier either, heim!'

'No, sire.'

'Well! come, Chicot, we shall both be afraid; come and see the fire, my friend, come. A good horse for M. Chicot!'

Chicot shrugged his shoulders, and mounted, without blinking, a good Spanish horse brought to him by order of the King.

Henry put his horse in a gallop, Chicot followed him.

On arriving at the front of his little army, Henry raised the visor of his helmet.

'Out with the standard ! let the new standard be unfurled !' he cried, in a tremulous voice. They undid the case, and the new colours, with the double escutcheon of Navarre and Bourbon, floated majestically in the breeze; it was white, and bore, on a blue ground, on one side the chains of gold; on the other the fleurs de lis of gold, with the label placed *en cœur*.

'Here,' said Chicot to himself, 'is a colour that will be roughly handselled, I'm afraid.'

At this moment, as if to reply to the imagination of Chicot, the cannon of the place thundered, and cut up a whole file of infantry within ten paces of the King.

'Ventre Saint Gris !' he said, 'did you see, Chicot ? 'tis all for the best, I think.' And his teeth chattered.

'He is going to be ill,' said Chicot.

'Ah !' murmured Henry, 'ah ! you are afraid, cursed carcass, you tremble; wait, wait a moment, I will make you shake for something.'

And burying his two spurs in the flanks of the white horse that carried him, he outran cavalry, infantry, and artillery, and arrived within a hundred yards of the place, red with the fire of the batteries, which thundered from the ramparts like a tempest, and reflected on his armour like the rays of the setting sun.

Here he kept his horse motionless for a space of ten minutes, his face turned towards the gate of the town, and crying :—

'The fascines ! ventre Saint Gris, the fascines !'

Mornay had followed him, his visor raised, sword in hand.

Chicot imitated Mornay; he had a cuirass on, but he did not draw the sword.

Behind these three men, bounded, excited by the example, the young Huguenot gentlemen, crying and shouting :—

'Vive Navarre !'

The Viscount de Turenne marched at their head, a fascine on the neck of his horse.

Each approached and threw his fascine; in an instant the ditch dug under the drawbridge was filled.

The artillery rushed forward; by losing thirty men out of forty, they succeeded in placing their petards under the door.

The grape-shot and musketry whistled like a storm of fire round Henry; twenty men fell in a moment before his eyes.

'Forward ! forward !' he cried; and he rode his horse into the midst of the artillery, and arrived at the edge of the ditch, at the moment the first petard exploded.

The gate was pierced in two places.

The artillerymen lighted the second petard.

There was a fresh rent in the wood; but immediately, through the triple opening, a score of arquebuses passed, which vomited their balls on the officers and soldiers.

The men fell round the King, like ears of corn under the sickle.

'Sire,' said Chicot, without thinking of himself, 'sire, in the name of Heaven, retire !'

Mornay said nothing, but he was proud of his pupil, and from time to time attempted to put himself before him; but Henry moved him aside with his hand by a nervous shake.

Suddenly, Henry felt that the sweat stood on his forehead and that a mist passed before his eyes.

'Ah ! cursed nature !' he exclaimed, 'it shall never be said that you have conquered me.'

And dismounting from his horse :—

'A hatchet !' he cried, 'a hatchet !'

And with a vigorous arm he demolished the muzzles of arquebuses, remnants of oak, and nails of brass.

At length a beam fell, a flap of the gate, a piece of the wall, and a hundred men threw themselves into the breach, crying :—

'Navarre ! Navarre ! Cahors is ours. Vive Navarre !'

Chicot had not quitted the King; he was with him under the vault of the gate, where Henry had entered one of the first; but at every arquebusade he saw him tremble and bow his head.

'Ventre Saint Gris !' said Henry, furious, 'have you ever seen such poltroonery, Chicot ?'

'No, sire,' replied the latter, 'I have never seen cowardice like yours; it is frightful.'

At this moment the soldiers of M. de Vezin attempted to dislodge Henry and his advance guard, established

under the vault of the gate and in the neighbouring houses.

Henry received them sword in hand.

But the besieged were the strongest; they succeeded in repulsing Henry and his men beyond the ditch.

'Ventre Saint Gris !' he exclaimed, 'I think that my colours give way ; in that case I shall carry them myself.'

And with a sublime effort, wresting the standard from the hands of the one who held it, he raised it in the air, and was the first to enter the place, half enveloped in its waving folds.

'Fear then,' he said, 'tremble then, now, poltroon !'

The balls whistled and flattened themselves with a strident echo, and perforated the standard with a dead and hollow sound.

MM. Turenne, Mornay, and a thousand others were pressing into this open gate, hastening to the suite of the King.

The cannon on the outside was silent; it was face to face, it was hand to hand, that they must henceforth struggle.

Above the noise of arms, the sound of the musketry, the clashing of iron, was heard the voice of M. de Vezin, who cried :—

'Barricade the streets, dig trenches, man the houses.'

'Oh !' said M. de Turenne, who was near enough to hear him, 'the siege of the town is over, my poor Vezin.'

And by way of accompaniment to these words, he fired a pistol at him, which wounded him in the arm.

'You deceive yourself, Turenne,' replied M. de Vezin, 'there are twenty sieges in Cahors yet; so if one is over, there still remains nineteen to make.'

M. de Vezin defended himself five days and five nights from street to street, from house to house.

Luckily for the growing fortune of Henry of Navarre; he had reckoned too much on the walls and garrisons of Cahors, so that he had neglected to apprise M. de Biron of the forces arrived against him.

For five days and five nights, Henry commanded as a captain and fought as a soldier; for five days and five nights he slept with a stone for his pillow, and awoke with a hatchet in his hand.

On each day they conquered a street, a place, a square;

each night the garrison attempted to regain the conquest of the day.

At length in the night of the fourth or fifth day, the enemy, harrassed, appeared to give some repose to the Protestant army. It was now Henry who attacked in his turn; they forced an entrenched post, which cost seven hundred men; nearly all the best officers were wounded; M. Turenne was struck with a ball in the shoulder, Mornay received a stone on the head, which nearly killed him.

The King was the only one who escaped; to the fear he had at first felt, and which he had so heroically overcome, had succeeded a feverish agitation, an audacity akin to madness; all the fastenings of his armour were broken, as much from his own efforts as from the blows of his enemies; he struck so roughly that a blow from him never wounded his man—it killed him.

When the last post was forced, the King entered the enclosure, followed by the everlasting Chicot, who, silent and sombre, had seen, during five days, and with despair, spring up at his side the terrific phantom of a monarchy destined to extinguish the monarchy of the Valois.

‘Well! what do you think of it, Chicot?’ said the King, raising the visor of his helmet, and as if he could read the soul of the poor ambassador.

‘Sire,’ murmured Chicot, with sadness, ‘sire, I think that you are a right royal king.’

‘And I, sire,’ exclaimed Mornay, ‘I say that you are an imprudent one; what! gauntlets thrown down, and the visor up, when they are firing at you on all sides—and stay, there’s another ball!’

In fact, at this moment, a ball whistled over the head of Henry, and cut in half one of the feathers of his crest.

And at the same instant, and as if to prove the words of Mornay, the King was surrounded by a dozen arquebusers of the private troop of the governor.

They had been placed in ambush there by M. de Vezin, and fired low and true.

The King’s horse was wounded; that of Mornay had a leg broken.

The King fell, a dozen swords were raised against him. Chicot alone had remained unhorsed; he dismounted, threw himself before the King, and used his rapier with

such rapid dexterity that he drove backward the most advanced.

Then raising Henry, entangled in the trappings of his horse, he brought him his own horse, and said to him :

'Sire, you will testify to the King of France, that if I have drawn a sword against him, I have at least touched no one.'

Henry drew Chicot towards him, and, with tears in his eyes, embraced him.

'Ventre Saint Gris !' he said, 'you shall be mine, Chicot; you shall live, you shall die with me, my child. Why, my service is as good as my heart !'

'Sire,' replied Chicot, 'I have but one service to follow in this world; 'tis that of my prince. Alas ! his lustre is diminishing, but I shall be faithful to adverse fortune, as I have despised the prosperous. Leave me, then, to serve and love my King whilst he lives, sire; I shall soon stand alone with him, do not envy him, then, his last servant.'

'Chicot,' replied Henry, 'I hold your promise, you understand ! you are dear and sacred to me; and after Henry of France, you shall have Henry of Navarre as a friend.'

'Yes, sire,' naïvely replied Chicot, respectfully kissing the King's hand.

'At present, you see, my friend,' said the King, 'Cahors is ours, M. de Vezin will have all his men slain; but I, rather than draw back an inch, will also see my own slain.'

The threat was unnecessary, and Henry had no occasion to persist much longer. His troops, led by M. de Turenne, had attacked the garrison; M. de Vezin was taken. The town was delivered up.

Henry took Chicot by the hand and led him into a house, still burning, and completely riddled with balls, and which served him as headquarters, and there he dictated to M. de Mornay a letter, for Chicot to carry to the King of France.

This letter was written in bad Latin, and finished in these words :—

'Quod mihi dixisti profuit multum. Cognosco meos devotos ; nosce tuos. Chicotus cætera expediet.'

Which in a few words signified :—

'What you have said to me has been very useful to me. I know my friends; know your own. Chicot will tell you the rest.'

'And now, friend Chicot,' continued Henry, 'embrace me, and take care not to soil yourself; for, God pardon me! I am as bloody as a butcher; I would willingly offer you a part of the venison if I knew that you ought to accept it, but I see by your looks that you would refuse it. However, here is my ring, take it, I desire it; and then, adieu, Chicot, I retain you no longer; speed to France, you will have success at the court in narrating what you have seen.'

Chicot accepted the ring, and departed. He was three days in persuading himself that he had not been in a dream, and ~~had awakened~~ at Paris before the windows of his house, to which M. de Joyeuse was giving serenades.

CHAPTER LV

WHAT TOOK PLACE AT THE LOUVRE, ABOUT THE SAME TIME THAT CHICOT ENTERED THE TOWN OF NERAC

THE necessity we were under of following Chicot to the end of his mission has kept us some time away from the Louvre, for which we must solicit the pardon of our readers.

It will, however, be no longer just to forget both the detail of the consequences of the enterprises, and that of which it had been the object.

The King, after having passed so bravely before the danger, had experienced that retrospective emotion which the strongest hearts sometimes feel when the danger is at a distance; he had entered the Louvre, then, without speaking; he had continued at his prayers a little longer than was his custom; and once yielded to God, he had forgotten to thank, so great was his fervour, the officers so vigilant, and the guards so devoted, who had aided him to escape the peril.

He then retired to bed, astonishing his valets de chambre by the rapidity with which he completed his toilet; one would have said he had hastened to sleep, that he

might find in the morning his ideas more fresh and more lucid.

D'Epernon, therefore, who had remained in the chamber of the King the last of all, still expecting thanks, left it in a bad humour, seeing that the thanks did not arrive.

And Loignac, on his legs near the velvet door, seeing that M. d'Epernon passed without breathing a word, turned suddenly round towards the Forty-Five, saying to them :—

The King has no further occasion for you, gentlemen, you can retire.'

By two o'clock in the morning, all the inmates of the Louvre were asleep.

The secret of the adventure was faithfully kept, and had transpired nowhere. The good bourgeois of Paris snored away conscientiously, without a suspicion that they had touched, with the ends of their fingers, the accession to the throne of a new dynasty.

M. d'Epernon unbooted himself immediately, and instead of running about the town as was his habit with a score of cavaliers, he followed the example of his august master, by retiring to bed without addressing a word to any one.

The solitary Loignac, who, like the *justum et tenacem* of Horace, would not have been diverted from his duties by the fall of the world, the solitary Loignac, visited the posts of the Swiss, and of the French guards, who performed their services with regularity, but without excess of zeal.

Three slight infractions of the laws of discipline were punished on this night as serious faults.

The next morning Henry, who, awakening, was impatiently attended by so many people, to know what they had to expect from him, took four basins of soup in his bed, instead of one, which was his allowance, and sent to Monsieur d'O. and Monsieur de Villequier to apprise them they must come and work in his chamber, at compiling a new edict of finances.

The Queen received an intimation to dine alone; and as she expressed, through one of her gentlemen, some inquietude as to the health of His Majesty, Henry deigned to reply, that in the evening he would receive the ladies, and have the collation laid in his cabinet.

The same reply was given to a gentleman from the

Queen-Mother, who, for the past two years, retired in her Hôtel de Soissons, sent, however, every day to inquire for her son.

MM. the secretaries of state looked at each other with uneasiness; the King was this morning distracted to such a point, that their enormities in matters of exactions drew not even a smile from His Majesty.

Now the distraction of a king is especially a matter of inquietude for secretaries of state.

But, in exchange, Henry played much with Master Love, saying to him, every time the animal squeezed his sharp fingers between his little white teeth :—

'Ah! ah! rebel! you would also bite me? ah! ah! you little rogue, you also attack your King? Why everything seems to interfere with him to-day?'

And Henry, with as many apparent efforts as Hercules, son of Alcmenes, made to tame the lion of Nemeus; tamed this monster as big as your fist, saying to him with unspeakable satisfaction :—

'Vanquished, Master Love, vanquished, infamous leaguer, Master Love; vanquished! vanquished! vanquished!'

This was all that MM. d'O. and Villequier, those two grand diplomatists who believed that no human secret could escape them, could seize on its passage; excepting these apostrophes to Master Love, Henry had remained perfectly silent.

He had to sign, he signed; he had to listen, he listened; closing his eyes so naturally, that it was impossible to ascertain whether he listened or whether he slept.

At length three o'clock in the afternoon sounded.

The King sent for M. d'Epernon.

They replied to him that the duke was reviewing the light horse.

He sent for Loignac.

They replied to him that he was trying some lately imported horses.

They expected to see the King annoyed at this double check to his wishes; not at all; against the general expectation, the King, with the most indifferent air in the world, began whistling a hunting song, an amusement to which he did not yield himself unless in a state of perfect contentedness with things.

It was evident that the desire felt by the King to

remain silent all the morning was changing to an increasing taste for talking.

This itch finished by becoming an irresistible want, but the King, having no one, was compelled to talk alone.

He demanded his luncheon; and whilst he lunched, was read to in a most edifying manner, which he interrupted to say to the reader:—

'It is Plutarch, is it not, who has written the life of Sylla?'

The reader, who read from the sacred writings, and was thus interrupted by a profane question, turned with astonishment towards the King.

The King repeated his question.

'Yes, sire,' repeated the reader.

'Do you remember the passage in which the historian narrates that the dictator escaped death?'

The reader hesitated.

'No, sire, not precisely,' he said; 'it is some time since I read Plutarch.'

At this moment they announced his eminence the Cardinal de Joyeuse.

'Ah! luckily,' exclaimed the King, 'here is a learned man, our friend; he will tell us this without hesitation.'

'Sire,' said the cardinal, 'am I happy enough to arrive at an opportune moment? 'tis a rare thing in this world.'

'My faith, yes, you heard my question?'

'Your Majesty demanded, I think, by what mode, and under what circumstances, the dictator Sylla escaped death.'

'Exactly; can you reply to it, cardinal?'

'Nothing easier, sire.'

'So much the better.'

'Sylla, who slew so many men, sire, never risked losing his life except in combats; does your Majesty allude to a combat?'

'Yes; and in one of the battles he engaged in, I think I remember that he saw death very close to him. Open a Plutarch, if you please, cardinal; there should be one there translated by that good Amyot, and read me that passage in the life of the Roman in which he escaped, thanks to the swiftness of his white horse, the javelins of his enemies.'

'Sire, there is no occasion to open Plutarch for that,

the event took place in the combat he engaged in with Telesarius the Samnite, and Laponius the Lucaman.'

'You must know this better than any one, my dear cardinal, you are so learned.'

'Your Majesty is really too good towards me,' replied the cardinal, bowing.

'Now,' said the King, after a short pause, 'now explain to me how the Roman lion, who was so cruel, was never disturbed by his enemies.'

'Sire,' said the cardinal, 'I shall reply to your Majesty by a word from this same Plutarch.'

'Reply, Joyeuse, reply.'

'Carbon, the enemy of Sylla, often said :—

"'I have to fight at once both a lion and a fox, who live in the soul of Sylla; but 'tis the fox that gives me the most trouble.'"

'Ah! ouida,' replied Henry, thoughtful, "'twas the fox!'

'Plutarch says so, sire.'

'And he is right,' said the King, 'he is right, cardinal. But, talking of combats, have you received any news from your brother?'

'Which, sire? Your Majesty is aware that I have four.'

'Of the Duke d'Arques, of my friend, in fact.'

'Not yet, sire.'

'Would that M. the Duke of Anjou, who until now has so well known how to play the fox, would now learn to play the lion a little!' said the King.

The cardinal did not reply; for this time Plutarch was of no assistance to him; he feared, like a skilful courtier, to reply disagreeably to the King in replying agreeably for the Duke of Anjou.

Henry, finding the cardinal maintaining a silence, resumed his battles with Master Love; and making a sign to the cardinal to remain, he rose, dressed himself sumptuously, and passed to his cabinet, where his court attended.

It is especially at the court that we scent, with the same instinct that is found amongst mountaineers, the approach or cessation of a storm; without one having spoken of it; without one having yet perceived the King, every one was prepared for the circumstance.

The two Queens were visibly uneasy.

Catherine, pale and anxious, saluted much, and spoke in a brief and harsh manner.

Louise de Vaudemont regarded no one, and listened to no one.

There were moments in which the poor young wife looked as if she would lose her reason.

The King entered.

His eye was keen, and his complexion rosy; on his countenance might be read an apparent good humour, which produced on every sombre face that waited for the appearance of his, the effect produced by bright sunshine on the groves jaundiced by the autumn.

All was gilded, empurpled on the very instant; in a second all was radiant.

Henry kissed the hand of his mother and that of his wife with the same gallantry as though he were still the Duke of Anjou. He addressed a thousand polite flatteries to the ladies, who were not accustomed to repetitions of this nature, and even went so far as to offer them sugar plums.

'We were uneasy about your health, my son,' said Catherine, regarding the King with peculiar attention, as if to assure herself that his rosy tint was not paint; that this good humour was not a mask.

'And you were wrong, madame,' replied the King, 'I was never better.'

And he accompanied these words with a smile, which passed from mouth to mouth.

'And to what happy influence, my son,' inquired Catherine, with ill-disguised uneasiness, 'are you indebted for this amelioration in your health?'

'To that of having laughed a great deal, madame,' replied the King.

Every one looked at each other with such profound astonishment, that it seemed as if the King had pronounced some enormity.

'Laughed a great deal? You may laugh much, my son,' said Catherine, with her austere mien, 'in that case you are very lucky.'

'You see, however, how I am, madame.'

'And on what subject have you given vent to such hilarity?'

'I must inform you, my mother, that yesterday evening I went to the wood of Vincennes.'

'Ah! I knew it.'

'Ah! You knew it?'

'Yes, my son, all that concerns you, is of importance to me, this is nothing new to you.'

'No, undoubtedly; I went to the wood of Vincennes then, when on my return, my scouts signalled an enemy's army, whose muskets sparkled in the road.'

'An enemy's army on the road to Vincennes?'

'Yes, my mother.'

'And where so?'

'Opposite the pond of the Jacobins, near the house of our good cousin.'

'Near the house of Madame de Montpensier?' exclaimed Louise de Vaudemont.

'Precisely, yes, madame, near Bel Esbat; I approached bravely to deliver battle, and I perceived——'

'My God! continue, sire,' said the Queen, really alarmed.

'Oh! reassure yourself, madame.'

Catherine waited anxiously; but neither a word nor a gesture betrayed her uneasiness.

'I perceived,' continued the King, 'a whole priory of good friars, who presented arms to me with warlike acclamations.'

The Cardinal de Joyeuse commenced laughing; all the court immediately excelled in this manifestation.

'Oh!' said the King, 'laugh, laugh, you are right, for it will be long talked of; I have in France more than ten thousand friars, of whom, at a pinch, I could make musketeers; so I shall create an office of grand-master of the shaven musketeers of His Most Christian Majesty, and I will give it to you, cardinal.'

'Sire, I accept; all services are good to me, provided they please your Majesty.'

During the colloquy of the King and the cardinal, the ladies had risen, in accordance with the etiquette of the times, and one by one, after having saluted the King, they quitted the chamber; the Queen followed them with the maids of honour.

The Queen-Mother alone remained; there was, in the isolated gaiety of the King, a mystery she determined to unravel.

'Ah! cardinal,' said the King suddenly, to the prelate who was preparing to leave, seeing the Queen-Mother remaining, and guessing that she wished to speak to her son; 'what has become of your brother du Bouchage?'

'Why, sire, I really do not know.'

'How! you do not know?'

'No, I scarcely ever see him; or rather, I don't see him at all,' replied the cardinal.

A grave and melancholy voice resounded from the lower end of the apartment.

'I am here, sire,' said the voice.

'Ah! 'tis him,' exclaimed Henry; 'approach, count, approach.'

The young man obeyed.

'Eh! vive Dieu!' said the King, looking at him with astonishment, 'on my faith as a gentleman, 'tis no longer a body, 'tis a spirit walking.'

'Sire, he works hard,' faltered the cardinal; himself stupefied at the change that a week had produced in the face and appearance of his brother.

In fact, du Bouchage was pale as a statue of wax, and his body, under the silk and embroidery, partook of the stiffness and temerity of a spirit.

'Come here, young man,' said the King to him, 'come. Thank you, cardinal, for your citation from Plutarch; on a similar occasion, I promise always to refer to you.'

The cardinal imagined that the King wished to remain alone with du Bouchage, and softly withdrew.

The King glanced at his departing step, and rested his eye on his mother, who remained motionless.

There now only remained with the King the Queen-Mother, M. d'Epemon, who was saying to her a thousand civilities, and du Bouchage.

At the door was Loignac, half courtier, half soldier, doing service rather than anything else.

The King seated himself, and signed to du Bouchage to approach him.

'Count,' he said to him, 'why do you hide yourself behind the ladies, do you not know that I take a pleasure in seeing you?'

'These words are a very great honour to me, sire,' replied the young man, bowing with great respect.

'Then how comes it, count, that we do not see you at the Louvre?'

'I am not seen, sire?'

'No, really, and I was complaining of it to the cardinal, your brother, who is still more learned than I supposed him.'

'If your Majesty does not see me,' said Henry, 'tis because your Majesty has not deigned to cast your eyes to the corner of this cabinet, sire; I am here every day at the same hour when the King appears. I even regularly assist at the rising of your Majesty, and I also offer my salutation when your Majesty leaves the council. I have never failed doing so, and I never will fail, as long as I can stand on my legs, for 'tis a sacred duty for me.'

'And 'tis this that makes you so unhappy,' said the King, in a friendly tone.

'Oh! your Majesty does not think so?'

'No, your brother and yourself love me.'

'Sire!'

'And I, also, love you. By the way, do you know that this poor Anne has written me from Dieppe?'

'I was ignorant of it, sire.'

'Yes, but you are not ignorant that he was in despair at going.'

'He admitted to me his regrets at quitting Paris.'

'Yes, but do you know what he said to me? this, that there existed a man who would have regretted Paris much more, and that if this order had reached you, you would have died.'

'Perhaps, sire.'

'He said more, for your brother says many things, when he is not in his sulks; he told me, that in such an event, you would have disobeyed me; is it true?'

'Sire, your Majesty was right in placing my death before my disobedience.'

'But if you had not died, however, from grief, at the order for this departure?'

'Sire, it would have been a greater suffering for me to disobey you, than to die, and yet,' added the young man, bending his pale forehead, as if to hide his embarrassment, 'I would have disobeyed.'

The King folded his arms, and regarded Joyeuse.

'Ah, ça! he said, 'why you are almost mad, I think, my poor count.'

The young man smiled sorrowfully.

'Oh! I am quite so, sire,' he said, 'and your Majesty is wrong in the terms of your reproach.'

'Then it is serious, my friend.'

Joyeuse stifled a sigh.

'Recount this to me, come.'

The young man carried his heroism as far as a smile.

'A great king, like yourself, sire, cannot humble himself to such confidences.'

'Yes, Henry, yes,' said the King, 'speak, narrate, you will amuse me.'

'Sire,' replied the young man proudly, 'your Majesty is mistaken; I must observe to him, there is nothing in my sadness that can amuse a noble heart.'

The King took the hand of the young man.

'Come, come,' he said, 'do not get angry, du Bouchage, you know that your King has also felt the pain of an unfortunate amour.'

'I know it, yes, sire, formerly.'

'I can share in your sufferings, then.'

'Tis too great a kindness on the part of a king.'

'No, listen; because there was nothing above me, when I suffered as you are suffering, but the power of God, I could call none to my assistance; you, on the contrary, my child, can look to me for help.'

'Sire!'

'And, consequently,' continued Henry, with an affectionate sadness, 'hope to see an end of your troubles.'

The young man shook his head by way of doubt.

'Du Bouchage,' said Henry, 'on my faith, you shall be happy, or I will cease to call myself the King of France.'

'Happy, I! Alas, sire, 'tis a thing impossible,' said the young man, with a smile mixed with indescribable bitterness.

'And why so?'

'Because my happiness is not of this world.'

'Henry,' continued the King, 'your brother, on leaving, recommended you to me, as to a friend; I require, since you consult me as to what you should do, neither the wisdom of your father, nor the science of your brother, the cardinal; I would be to you as an elder brother; come, have confidence; I assure you, du Bouchage, that for all, except death, my power, and my affection for you, shall find a remedy.'

'Sire,' replied the young man, falling on his knees before the King, 'sire, do not confound me by the offer of a kindness to which I cannot respond; my disease is without remedy, for 'tis my disease that makes my only joy.'

'Du Bouchage, you are a madman, and you kill yourself with chimeras; 'tis I who tell you so.'

'I know it well, sire,' tranquilly replied the young man.

'Well, but,' exclaimed the King, with a little impatience, 'is it a marriage you wish to make, is it an influence you wish to exercise?'

'Sire, 'tis a love I wish to inspire; you see that all the world is powerless to procure me this favour. I alone must obtain it—and obtain it for myself alone.'

'Why then despair?'

'Because I feel that I never shall obtain it.'

'Try, try, my child; you are rich, you are young, you are handsome; where is the woman who could resist the triple influence of beauty, love, and youth? There is none, du Bouchage, there is none.'

'How many men, in my place, would bless your Majesty for your excessive indulgence, your favour, with which I am loaded! To be loved by a King like your Majesty, 'tis almost as great as being loved by the Almighty.'

'Then you accept; good! Say nothing if you wish to be discreet; I will obtain information, I will have steps taken; you know what I have done for your brother, I will do as much for you. A hundred thousand crowns will not stop me.'

Du Bouchage seized the hand of the King, and glued it to his lips.

'May your Majesty one day demand my blood of me,' he said, 'and I will shed it to the last drop, to prove how grateful I am for the protection I refuse.'

Henry the Third turned upon his heel in a pet.

'Really,' he said, 'these Joyeuses are more headstrong than the Valois; here is one who brings me every day his long face, and his eyes encircled with black! how cheerful it is! to say nothing of the many gay hearts at the court!'

'Oh! sire, let not this vex you,' exclaimed the young man, 'I will spread the fever over my face like a gay paint, and every one will think, on seeing me smile, that I am the happiest of men.'

'Yes, but I, I—I shall know the contrary, obstinate creature, and this knowledge will make me sad.'

'Will your Majesty permit me to retire?' said du Bouchage.

'Yes, yes, my child, go, and endeavour to be a man.'

The young man kissed the hand of the King, bowed to the Queen-Mother, passed proudly before d'Epernon, who did not salute him, and left.

Scarcely had he passed the threshold of the door when the King cried :—

'Shut, Nambu.'

Immediately the usher, to whom this order was addressed, proclaimed from the antechamber that the King would receive no more.

Henry then approached the Duke d'Epernon, and tapping him on the shoulder,—

'La Valette,' he said to him, 'you will make this evening, to your Forty-Five, a distribution of money, and you will give them leave of absence for a day and a night. I should wish them to enjoy themselves. By the mass! they saved me, the rascals, saved, like the white horse of Sylla.'

'Saved!' said Catherine, with astonishment.

'Yes, my mother.'

'Saved, from whom?'

'Ah! there it is! ask it of d'Epernon.'

'I ask it of you, 'tis still better, I think.'

'Well! madame, our very dear cousin, the sister of your best friend, M. de Guise. Ah! do not defend yourself, he's your best friend.'

Catherine smiled like a woman who says,—

'He will never comprehend.'

The King observed the smile, pressed together his lips, and continued :—

'The sister of your best friend, de Guise, set an ambuscade for me yesterday.'

'An ambuscade?'

'Yes, madame; yesterday I was near being arrested—assassinated, perhaps.'

'By M. de Guise?' exclaimed Catherine.

'You do not think so?'

'No, I confess it,' said Catherine.

'D'Epernon, my friend, for the love of God, recount the adventure from end to end to madame the Queen-Mother; if I spoke myself, and she continued to shrug her shoulders as she is doing, I shall get in a passion, and my faith, I have no health left.'

And turning towards Catherine :—

'Adieu, madame, adieu; cherish M. de Guise as much

as you please; I have already had M. de Salcède broken, you remember him ?'

'Undoubtedly !'

'Well ! May the MM. Guise do as you do—not forget him.'

Thus saying, the King shrugged his shoulders higher than his mother had done, and re-entered his apartments, followed by Master Love, who was forced to run in order to keep up with him.

CHAPTER LVI

THE RED FEATHER AND THE WHITE FEATHER

AFTER attending on men, let us now attend a little to things.

It was eight o'clock in the evening, and the house of Robert Briquet, lonely, sad, and dark, threw out its triangular shadow upon a cloudy sky, evidently more disposed to rain than to moonlight.

This unfortunate house, the soul of which seemed fled, made a worthy appendage to that mysterious mansion which we have already had the honour of introducing to our readers, and which stood opposite to it. Philosophers who pretend that nothing lives, nothing speaks, nothing feels, like things inanimate, would have said, on beholding the two houses, that they yawned opposite one other.

Not far from this was heard a great noise of iron, mixed with confused voices, vague murmurs, and yellings, as if the Corybantes were celebrating, in some cavern, the mysteries of the kind goddess.

It was probably this hubbub that attracted a young man, with a violet coloured cap, a red plume, and a gray cloak, a handsome cavalier, who remained for some minutes before the uproar, and returned slowly, pensive, and his head bent down towards the house of Maître Robert Briquet.

Now this shocking symphony of iron, was the noise of saucepans; these vague murmurs, that of kettles, etc., boiling on the brasiers, and the spits turning to the feet of dogs; these cries, those of Maître Fournichon, host of

the Proud Chevalier, occupied with the cares of his furnaces; and these yelpings, those of Dame Fournichon, who was preparing the boudoirs of her towers.

When the young man with the violet cap had well regarded the fire, well respired the perfume of the game, well questioned the curtains of the windows, he returned a few steps, and again commenced examining them.

But however independent his step might have seemed at first sight, there was a limit which the promenader never passed; this was the little gutter that divided the street before the house of Robert Briquet, and abutted on that of the mysterious one opposite.

But we must also observe that each time the promenader arrived at this limit, he there found, like a vigilant sentinel, another young man of nearly the same age as himself, with a black cap and white plume, a violet cloak, who, with knitted brow and a steady eye, his hand on his sword, seemed to say, like the giant Adamaster :—

‘No farther shalt thou go, without meeting the storm.’

The young man with the red plume, that is, the first we have introduced on the scene, returned twenty times in this manner without remarking anything of this, so deep in thought was he. Certainly, it was not without seeing a man like himself, measuring the public road; but this man was too well dressed to be a robber, and never had he for a moment thought of troubling himself about anything, unless of what was doing at the Proud Chevalier.

But the other, on the contrary, on every return of the red plume, became more and more irritated; at length, the dose of irritated fluid became so heavy with the white plume, that it finished by striking the red plume, and attracting its attention.

He raised his head, and read on the visage of the one who was in front of him, all the ill will he seemed to feel towards him.

This naturally induced him to think that he incommoded the young man; and this supposition brought forth the desire of knowing in what he incommoded him.

Consequently, he began to observe attentively the house of Robert Briquet.

And from this house he passed to that which faced it.

At length, when he had well remarked both the one and

the other, without disturbing himself, or appearing in the least annoyed at the fashion in which the young man with the white plume regarded him, he turned his back upon him, and again visited the bustling fires of Maître Fournichon.

The white plume, happy at having routed his adversary, for he attributed to defeat the wheel-about movement he had just seen him make, began walking in his own way, that is, from east to west, whilst the other went from west to east.

But, when each had arrived at the point he had inwardly marked as his course, he turned round, and came in a straight line upon the other, and in so straight a line, that were it not for the stream, a new Rubicon that must be passed, they would have touched each other's noses, so scrupulously respected had been the precision of the straight line.

The white plume twirled his little moustache with an impatient movement.

The red plume looked astonished, and again glanced at the mysterious house.

The white plume might then be seen to make a step to pass the Rubicon, but the red plume was already at a distance, the inverse line of march recommenced.

For five minutes we might have supposed they would only meet at the antipodes, but presently, with the same instinct, and the same precision as at first, both returned at the same time.

Like two clouds, that follow in different currents the same atmospheric zone, and which are seen to advance towards each other, displaying the black flakes, prudent advance guards, the two promenaders arrived this time opposite one another, resolved to march on, rather than retreat a step.

More impatient, probably, than the one who came to meet him, the white plume, instead of stopping, as he had done at the gutter, bestrided the said gutter, and made his adversary retreat, who, not suspecting this aggression, and his two arms confined under his cloak, nearly lost his balance.

'Ah, ça ! sir,' said the latter, 'are you mad, or do you intend to insult me ?'

'Sir, my intention is to make you understand that you greatly incommode me; it even appeared to me, that

without the necessity of telling you so, you had perceived it.'

'Not the least in the world, sir; for it is my habit to see nothing I do not wish to see.'

'There are, however, certain things that will attract your attention, I hope, if they are flaunted before your eyes.'

And suiting the action to the word, the young man with the white plume, disencumbered himself of his cape, and drew his sword, which sparkled under a ray of the moon, gliding at this moment between two clouds.

The red plume remained motionless.

'One would think, sir,' he replied, shrugging his shoulders, 'that you had never drawn a blade from its scabbard, in such haste are you to draw it forth against a person who does not defend himself.'

'No, but who will defend himself, I hope.'

The red plume smiled tranquilly, which doubled the irritation of his adversary.

'Why so? And what right have you to prevent my walking in the street?'

'Why do you walk in this street?'

'Parbleu! a pretty question! Because it pleases me.'

'Ah! it pleases you.'

'Without doubt'; you walk here yourself! are you licensed by the King to occupy alone the pavement of the street de Bussy?'

'Whether I am licensed or not, matters little.'

'You are wrong; it matters a great deal, on the contrary; I am a faithful subject of His Majesty, and would not disobey him.'

'Ah! you are jesting, I think.'

'And if I did! You menace?'

'Heaven and earth! I tell you that you annoy me, sir, and that if you do not take yourself off of your own free-will, I shall certainly remove you by force.'

'Oh! oh! sir, we shall see about this.'

'Eh, morbleu! 'tis what I told you an hour ago.'

'Sir, I have a particular affair in this neighbourhood, you are therefore apprised; now, if you absolutely desire it, I will readily exchange a few passes with the sword, but I shall not remove myself.'

'Sir,' said the white plume, brandishing his sword and gathering himself up like a man preparing to take his

guard, 'I am named the Count Henry du Bouchage, I am brother to M. the Duke de Joyeuse; for the last time, does it please you to yield me the ground, and retire ?'

'Sir,' replied the red plume, 'I am named the Viscount Ernauton de Carmainges; you do not at all incommode me, and I find no inconvenience in your remaining.'

Du Bouchage reflected a moment, and replaced his sword in the scabbard.

'Excuse me, sir,' he said, 'I am half mad, being in love.'

'And I also am in love,' replied Ernauton, 'but I think myself in no way mad on that account.'

Henry turned pale.

'You are in love ?'

'Yes, sir.'

'And you avow it.'

'Since when is it a crime ?'

'But amorous in this street ?'

'For the moment, yes.'

'In the name of Heaven, sir, tell me who you are in love with.'

'Ah ! Monsieur du Bouchage, you have not reflected on what you demand of me; you well know that a gentleman cannot reveal a secret of which he only possesses a moiety.'

'It's true, it's true; pardon Monsieur de Carmainges; but really, none under heaven is so unhappy as I am.'

There was so much real grief and eloquent despair, in these last words pronounced by the young man, that Ernauton was profoundly touched.

'Ah ! mon Dieu ! I understand,' he said, 'you fear we are rivals.'

'I do fear it.'

'Heim !' said Ernauton; 'well ! sir, I shall be frank.'

Joyeuse turned pale, and passed his hand across his forehead.

'I have a rendezvous.'

'You have a rendezvous ?'

'Yes, in a good shape.'

'In this street ?'

'In this street.'

'Written ?'

'Yes, and very prettily written too.'

'By a woman.'

'No, by a man.'

'From a man ! what do you mean ?'

'Why, nothing more than what I say. I have a rendezvous with a woman, by a very pretty writing from a man; it is not precisely quite so mysterious; but it is more elegant; it seems she has a secretary.'

'Ah !' murmured Henry, 'finish, sir, in the name of Heaven, finish.'

'You demand it in such a way that I know not how to refuse you. I will then give you the tenor of the billet.'

'I am listening.'

'You will see if it has anything to do with you.'

'Enough, sir; for pity's sake ! they have not given me a rendezvous, I have received no billet.'

Ernauton drew from his purse a little paper.

'There is the note, sir,' he said, 'it would be difficult for me to read it to you in such a dark night; but it is short, and I know it by heart; you may depend upon me for not deceiving you.'

'Oh ! completely.'

'Here then are the terms in which it is written.'

'"Monsieur Ernauton, my secretary is, by me, charged to say to you, that I have a great desire to converse with you, for an hour; your merit has touched me."'

'That is it, is it ?' demanded du Bouchage.

'My faith, yes, sir, the sentence is even underlined. I pass over another phrase a little too flattering.'

'And you attended ?'

'That is, that I attend now, as you see.'

'Then they must open the door to you.'

'No, they are to whistle three times from the window.'

Henry, all trembling, placed one of his hands on the arm of Ernauton, and with the other, pointed to the mysterious house.

'From there ?' he said.

'Not at all,' replied Ernauton, pointing to the towers of the Proud Chevalier, 'from there ?'

Henry uttered a cry of joy.

'You are not going here, then ?' he said.

'Oh ! no, the note says positively, "hostelry of the Proud Chevalier."'

'Oh ! may you be happy, sir,' said the young man, pressing his hand; 'oh, pardon me my incivility, my foolishness. Alas ! you know it, for the man who really loves, there exists but one woman ; and seeing you,

without cessation, return as far as this house, I supposed it was by this woman you were expected.'

'I have nothing to pardon you, sir,' said Ernauton, smiling, 'for really, for a moment, I had myself an idea that you were in the street for the same motive as myself.'

'And you had the incredible patience to say nothing to me, sir; oh! you do not love, you do not love!'

'My faith, listen, I have not as yet any great right; I await some elucidation before I get angry. These grand dames are so strange, and so mysterious in their caprices, and a mystification is so amusing!'

'Come, come, Monsieur de Carmainges, you do not love like me, and——'

'And yet?' repeated Ernauton.

'And yet you are more happy?'

'Ah! they are cruel in that house, then?'

'Monsieur de Carmainges,' said Joyeuse, 'it is three months since I have loved outrageously she who inhabits it, and I have not yet had the happiness of hearing the sound of her voice.'

'The devil! you have not advanced. But listen, then.'

'What?'

'Didn't I hear a whistle.'

'Indeed, I think I heard it.'

The young men listened, a second whistle was heard, in the direction of the Proud Chevalier.

'Monsieur the Count,' said Ernauton, 'you will excuse me for not longer keeping you company, but I think that is my signal.'

A third whistle was heard.

'Go,' said Henry, 'go, and good luck.'

Ernauton departed hastily, and his interlocutor saw him disappear in the darkness of the street, to reappear in the light reflected from the windows of the Proud Chevalier, and again disappear.

As to himself, more gloomy than before, for this sort of struggle had for a moment drawn him from his lethargy:

'Well,' he said, 'let us do our accustomed duty, let us knock, as usual, at the cursed door that never opens.'

And saying these words, he advanced unsteadily towards the door of the mysterious house.

CHAPTER LVII

THE DOOR OPENS

BUT on arriving at the door of the mysterious house, the poor Henry was seized with his habitual hesitation.

'Courage,' he said to himself, 'let us knock.'

And he made another step.

But before knocking, he looked once more behind him, and saw in the road the brilliant reflection of the lights from the hostelry.

'Yonder,' he said, 'enter for love and joy, men who are sent for and do not even desire it; why have I not a tranquil heart, and a careless smile, I should perhaps enter yonder also instead of vainly attempting to enter here.'

The clock of Saint-Germain-des-Pres, was heard striking heavily in the air.

'Come, ten o'clock is striking,' murmured Henry.

He placed his foot on the threshold of the door, and raised the knocker.

'A frightful life,' he murmured, 'a life of old age; ah! what day might I say, happy death, smiling death, gentle tomb, salvation!'

He knocked a second time.

'Just so,' he continued, listening, 'there is the noise of the interior door that creaks, the noise of the staircase that groans, the noise of steps that approach—thus always, always the same thing.'

And he knocked a third time.

'Another stroke,' he said, 'the last; just the same, the step becomes lighter, the attendant looks through the iron trellis, he sees my pale, my sinister, my insupportable figure, and then turns away without ever opening!'

The cessation of all noise seemed to justify the prediction of the unhappy youth.

'Adieu, cruel house; adieu, until to-morrow,' he said.

And stooping, until his forehead came on a level with the door-step, he dropped, from the bottom of his soul a kiss, that made the hard granite tremble, less hard, however, than the hearts of the inhabitants of the house.

And, as he had done the night before, and as he had intended doing the next day, he retired.

But scarcely had he taken two steps, when, to his great surprise, the bolt grated in its socket; the door opened, and the attendant bowed profoundly.

It was the same, whose portrait we have traced in his interview with Robert Briquet.

'Good-evening, sir,' he said in a rank voice, but the sound of which, however, appeared to du Bouchage, sweeter than the softest of the cherubins heard in the songs of infancy, when we dream of heaven.

Trembling aghast, Henry, who had by this time walked a dozen steps, returned hastily, and joining his hands, he reeled so visibly, that the attendant held him, to prevent him from falling on the door-step; and which the man did, with an evident expression of respectful compassion.

'Well, sir,' he said; 'here I am; explain to me, I beg, what you desire.'

'I have loved so long,' replied the young man, 'that I no longer know whether I still love. My heart has beat so much, that I am uncertain if it still beats.'

'Would it please you, sir,' said the attendant respectfully, 'to seat yourself here, near me, and converse?'

'Oh! yes.'

The attendant made him a sign with his hand.

Henry obeyed the sign, as he would have obeyed the sign of the King of France, or a Roman emperor.

'Speak, sir,' said the attendant, when they were seated near one another, 'and tell me your wish.'

'My friend,' replied du Bouchage, "'tis not to-day we speak for the first time, nor meet in this manner. Twenty times, you know, I have waited for and surprised you, at the turn of a street; I have then offered you gold enough to enrich you, were you the most avaricious of men; at other times, I have attempted to intimidate you, never have you listened to me, you have always seen me suffering, and that without pitying, apparently at least, my sufferings. To-day you tell me to speak to you, you invite me to express my wishes to you; what has happened then, my God! what fresh misfortune is concealed from me, by this condescension on your part?'

The servitor heaved a sigh. It was evident he had a heart, and a pitying heart, under this rude envelope.

This sigh was heard by Henry, and encouraged him.

'You know,' he continued, 'that I love, and how I love;

you have seen me pursue a woman, and discover her, despite her efforts to hide from me, and shun me; never, in my greatest affliction, has a bitter word escaped me; never have I given way to those ideas of violence, that spring from despair, and the counsel that fiery youth whispers in our ear when the blood is hot.'

'Tis true, sir,' said the attendant, 'and in this, full justice is rendered you by my mistress and myself.'

'Then acknowledge,' continued Henry, pressing between his hands, those of the vigilant guardian, 'could I not some evening, when you refused me an entrance to the house, could I not break in the door, as is every day accomplished, by the merest scholar drunk or in love? Then, were it but for a moment, I should have seen this inexorable woman, I should have spoken to her.'

'Tis also true.'

'Lastly,' continued the young count, with inexpressible sweetness and melancholy, 'I am something in this world, my name is great, my fortune is great, my credit is great, the King himself, the King, protects me; but lately, the King counselled me, to confide my griefs to him, told me to have recourse to him, offered me his protection.'

'Ah!' said the attendant, with evident alarm.

'I would not accept it,' the young man hastily added; 'no, no, I refused all, all, to come and pray with joined hands, that I may see opened that door, which, I know well, never will be opened.'

'Monsieur the Count, you have indeed a noble heart, and deserved to be loved.'

'Well,' interrupted Henry, with a grievous oppression at the heart, 'this man with a loyal heart, and in your own opinion, worthy of being loved, to what do you condemn him? Every day my page carries a letter, it is not even received; every night I knock at the door myself, and every night they reject me; in fact, they allow me to suffer, to despair, to die in this street, without feeling for me the compassion they would show to a poor howling dog. Ah! my friend, I tell you, this woman has not a woman's heart; an unhappy man may not be loved, true; ah! my God! we can no more command our heart to love, than to tell it not to love. But the unhappy man is pitied, and there is a word of consolation for him; the unfortunate who falls, is commiserated, and a hand is

stretched out to raise him; but no, no; this woman feasts on my punishments; no, this woman has not a heart, for if she possessed one, she would have killed me with a refusal from her own mouth, or have had me killed with the blow of a poniard, or dagger; dead, I should at least suffer no longer.'

'Monsieur the Count,' replied the servitor, after attentively listening to all the young man had said, 'the lady you accuse is far, be assured, from having a heart so insensible, and especially so cruel, as you say; she suffers more than you, for she has sometimes seen you, she has comprehended all you suffer, and she feels for you a deep sympathy.'

'Ah! compassion, compassion,' exclaimed the young man, wiping away the cold sweat, that stood upon his forehead; 'ah! may the day come, when this heart you so much vaunt, may know what love is, a love such as I feel; and if, in exchange for this love, she is then offered compassion, I shall indeed be well avenged.'

'Monsieur the Count, Monsieur the Count, her not responding to a love, is no proof that she has never loved; this woman has perhaps felt the passion, stronger than you ever felt it; this woman, perhaps, has loved as you will never love.'

Henry raised his hands to heaven.

'When we have loved like this, we love for ever,' he exclaimed.

'Have I told you she loves no longer, Monsieur the Count?' said the servitor.

Henry uttered a painful cry, and sunk down as though struck with death.

'She loves!' he exclaimed, 'she loves! ah! my God, my God!'

'Yes, she loves; but be not jealous of the man she loves, Monsieur the Count; that man is no longer of this world; my mistress is a widow,' added the servitor, compassionately, hoping by these words, to calm the despair of the young man.

And indeed, as by enchantment, these words restored to him life and hope.

'Well, in Heaven's name, do not abandon me,' he said; 'she is a widow, you say, then she is so but a short time; the source of her tears will dry up; she is a widow, ah! my friend, she loves no one then, since she loves a corpse,

a spirit, a name; death is less than absence; to tell me she loves the dead, is to tell me she will love me, eh! my God! all heavy griefs are calmed by time; when the widow of Mausolus, who had sworn at the tomb of her husband, an eternal grief, when the widow of Mausolus had exhausted her tears, she was healed; regrets are a malady, whoever is not carried off by the crisis, issues from the crisis more vigorous and more vivacious than before.

The servitor shook his head.

'This lady, Monsieur the Count,' he replied, 'like the widow of King Mausolus, has sworn to the dead an eternal fidelity; but I know her, and she will be more faithful to her word, than the forgetful woman of whom you speak.'

'I will wait, I will wait ten years, if necessary,' exclaimed Henry; 'God will not permit her to die of chagrin, or violently to abridge her days, you see; since she is not dead, 'tis that she may live, and that since she lives I may hope.'

'Oh! young man, young man,' said the servitor in a gloomy tone, 'count not thus with the sombre thoughts of the living, with the urgencies of the dead; she has lived, you say; yes, she has lived, not a day, not a month, not a year; she has lived seven years!' Joyeuse started. 'But do you know why, for what object, to accomplish what resolution, she has lived? She will console herself, you hope? Never, Monsieur the Count, never! 'tis I who tell you so, 'tis I who swear it to you, I who was but the humble servant of the dead; I, who, whilst he lived, had a soul pious, ardent, and full of hope, and who since his death, am become a hardened heart; well, I, who am but her attendant, I repeat to you, I shall never console myself.'

'This man, so much regretted,' interrupted Henry, 'this happy corpse, this husband?'

'He was not the husband, he was the lover, Monsieur the Count; and a woman like her who, unfortunately, you are in love with, has but one lover in her lifetime.'

'My friend, my friend,' exclaimed the young man, frightened at the savage majesty of this man, with such a lofty spirit, but who, notwithstanding, was lost under a vulgar dress, 'my friend, I conjure you, intercede for me.'

'I!' he exclaimed, 'I! listen, Monsieur the Count, if I had thought you capable of using violence towards my mistress, I would have slain you, slain you with this hand.'

And he drew from under his cloak a muscular and nervous arm, which looked like that of a young man, of scarcely twenty-five years, whilst his whitened hair, and his bent figure, gave him the appearance of a man of sixty.

'If, on the contrary,' he continued, 'I had imagined that my mistress loved you, 'tis she, who should have died.'

'Now, Monsieur the Count, I have said what I had to say; seek not to make me confess more; for, on my honour; and although I am not a gentleman, believe me, my honour is worth something, on my honour, I have said all I can avow.'

Henry rose, sick at heart.

'I thank you,' he said, 'for thus compassionating my griefs; I am now decided.'

'And you will be calmer for the future, then? Monsieur the Count, and you will keep at a distance from us; you will leave us to a destiny worse than yours, believe me.'

'Yes, I will keep at a distance from you, indeed, be tranquil,' said the young man, 'and for ever.'

'You would die, I comprehend you.'

'Why should I conceal it from you? I cannot live without her, I must therefore die, when assured I shall never possess her.'

'Monsieur the Count, we have often spoken of death, with my mistress; believe me, the death we give ourselves with our own hand, is an evil one.'

'Consequently it is not the one I shall choose; there is for a young man of my name, my age, and fortune, a death which from all time has been a happy one, 'tis that we receive in defending our king and country.'

'If you suffer beyond your strength, if you owe nothing to those who will survive you, if death on the field of battle is offered you, die, Monsieur the Count, die; long since, I should have died, were I not condemned to live.'

'Adieu, and thanks,' replied Joyeuse, tendering his hand to the unknown servitor; 'may we meet again in another world!'





F.G.

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'Henry received them sword in hand.'

P

And he departed swiftly, throwing at the feet of the attendant, touched at his deep affliction, a heavy purse of gold.

Midnight sounded at the church of Saint-Germain-des-Pres.

CHAPTER LVIII

HOW A GREAT LADY LOVED IN THE YEAR OF GRACE 1586

THE three whistles which at frequent intervals had traversed the space, were really those which were to serve as a signal to the happy Ernauton.

So when the young man was near the house, he found Dame Fournichon at the door, where she awaited her customers with a smile, which made her resemble a mythological goddess, represented by a Flemish painter.

Dame Fournichon still held in her large white hand, a gold crown piece, which another hand, also white, but more delicate than her own, had deposited in it on passing.

She regarded Ernauton, and placing her hands on her hips, filled up the cavity of the door, in such a way as to render all entrance impossible.

Ernauton, on his side, stopped, like a man who wishes to pass.

'What is your wish, sir ?' she said; 'who do you seek ?'

'Did not a person whistle three times, just now, from the window of that little tower, my good dame ?'

'Certainly.'

'Well ! I am the person signalled by this whistling.'

'You ?'

'Yes, I !'

'Oh ! that's different then, if you give me your word of honour.'

'On the faith of a gentleman, my dear Madame Fournichon.'

'In that case, I believe you; enter, my fine cavalier, enter.'

And joyful at having, at length, one of those customers she so ardently desired, for the unfortunate Rose-tree of Love, which had been dethroned by the Proud Chevalier, the hostess showed Ernauton up the winding staircase,

which led to the best ornamented, and the most discreet of her little towers.

A small door, very vulgarly painted, gave entrance to a sort of antechamber, and from this antechamber, you arrived at the tower itself, furnished, decorated, carpeted with a little more luxury than might have been expected in this distant corner of Paris; but it must be observed, Madame Fournichon had displayed her taste in the embellishment of this tower, her favourite, and we generally succeed in what we undertake in love.

Madame Fournichon then had succeeded, as far as was permitted a very low mind to succeed in such a matter.

When the young man entered the antechamber, he smelt a strong scent of berjoin and aloes, it was a holocaust, made, no doubt, by the person, a little too susceptible, who, whilst awaiting Ernauton, endeavoured to dispel, by the aid of vegetable perfumes, the culinary vapours, exhaled from the spit and the saucepans.

Dame Fournichon followed the young man step by step; she pushed him from the staircase to the antechamber, and from the antechamber into the tower, with eyes lessened by an anacreontic twinkling; she then retired.

Ernauton remained with his right hand on the door screen, his left on the door latch, and half bent by his salutation.

For he had perceived, in the voluptuous demi-tint of the tower, lighted by a small candle of red wax, one of those elegant figures of a woman, that invariably commands, if not love, at least attention, when it is not desire.

Reclining on some cushions, completely enveloped in silk and velvet, this lady, whose delicate foot hung over the extremity of this luxuriant couch, was occupied in burning, at the candle, the remains of a little branch of aloes, the incense from which she at times approached to her face, to inhale the scent; filling also with this smoke, the folds of her hood, and her hair, as if she would entirely fumigate herself with the intoxicating vapour.

From the manner in which she threw the remains of the branch in the fire, dropped her robe over her tiny foot, and drew her coiffe over her masked face, Ernauton perceived that she had heard him enter, and knew him to be near her.

She did not however turn round.

Ernauton waited a moment; she did not turn.

'Madame,' said the young man, in a voice he endeavoured to render mild, from remembrance, 'you have sent for your humble servant; he is here.'

'Ah! very well,' said the lady, 'sit down, I beg of you, Monsieur Ernauton.'

'Pardon, madame, but I must, in the first place, thank you, for the honour you do me.'

'Oh! that is civil, and you are right, Monsieur de Carmainges, and yet you do not at present know whom you thank, I presume.'

'Madame,' said the young man, approaching her by degrees, 'your face is concealed under a mask, your hand hidden under a glove; at the very moment I entered, you withdrew from me the sight of a foot which, certainly, would have rendered me jealous of your whole person; I see nothing that permits me to recognise; I can therefore only guess.'

'And you guess who I am?'

'Her whom my heart desires, her whom my imagination paints as young, handsome, powerful, and rich, too rich and too powerful even, for me to believe that what is happening to me is real, and that I am not dreaming at this moment.'

'Had you much trouble to enter here?' demanded the lady, without replying directly to this flow of words, which escaped from the too full heart of Ernauton.

'No, madame, the ingress was easier to me than I had expected.'

'For a man, everything is easy, it's true; but it is not the same with a woman.'

'I regret much, madame, the trouble you have taken, and for which I can but offer you my humble thanks.'

But the lady seemed already to have passed to another subject.

'What were you saying to me, sir?' she said negligently, drawing off her glove, to exhibit an adorable round and small hand.

'I said to you, madame, that, without having seen your features, I know who you are, and that, without the fear of being deceived, I may tell you that I love you.'

'Then you think yourself enabled to reply, that I am really her you expected to meet here.'

'Though denied a look, my heart tells me so.'

'Then you know me?'

'I know you, yes.'

'Really, you, a provincial, scarcely imported, you already know the ladies of Paris?'

'Amongst all the women of Paris, madame, I know as yet, but one.'

'And that one is myself?'

'I think so.'

'And by what do you recognise me?'

'By your voice, your grace, your beauty.'

'By my voice, I can understand, I cannot disguise it; from my grace, I may take the word as a compliment; but as to my beauty, I cannot admit the reply but from hypothesis.'

'Why so, madame?'

'Undoubtedly, you recognise my beauty, and my beauty is veiled.'

'It was less so, madame, the day when, to obtain you an entrance into Paris, I held you so close to me, that your bosom touched my shoulders, and your breath burnt my cheek.'

'So that on the receipt of my letter, you guessed it referred to me.'

'Oh! no, no, madame, do not believe it. I had not for a moment such an idea. I thought I was the sport of some jest, the victim of some error; I thought I was threatened with one of those catastrophes, which they call lucky fortunes; and it is only within a few minutes, that on seeing you, on touching you——'

And Ernauton moved as if to take a hand, which drew back from his.

'Enough,' said the lady, 'the fact is, I have committed an egregious folly.'

'And in what, madame, I pray?'

'In what! you say you know me, and you ask me, in what I have committed a folly?'

'Ah! it's true, madame, and I am very little, very obscure near your highness.'

'But for God's sake! do me the pleasure to be silent, sir. Have you no wit by any chance?'

'What have I done, madame, in the name of heaven?'

said Ernauton frightened.

'What! you see me in a mask.'

'Well !'

'If I wear a mask it is probably with the intention of disguising myself, and you call me highness ? Why don't you open the window, and publish my name in the street ?'

'Oh ! pardon, pardon,' said Ernauton, falling on his knees, 'but I believed in the discretion of these walls.'

'It appears to me you are credulous ?'

'Alas ! madame, I am in love !'

'And you are convinced, that all at once I respond to this love, by a similar passion ?'

Ernauton rose up, quite piqued.

'No, madame,' he replied.

'And what do you think ?'

'I think you have something important to say to me; that you did not wish to receive me at the Hôtel de Guise, or at your house of Bel Esbat, and that you preferred a secret conversation in an isolated place.'

'You thought this ?'

'Yes.'

'And what do you think I have to tell you ? come, speak; I shall not be sorry to appreciate your perspicacity.'

And the lady, under her apparent indifference, exhibited, despite herself, some little inquietude.

'How should I know, madame ?' replied Ernauton; 'something in reference to M. de Mayenne for example ?'

'Have I not my couriers, sir, who, by to-morrow night, will have told me more than you can possibly tell me, since you told me yesterday all you knew about him ?'

'Perhaps also some question to put to me, as to the event of last night ?'

'Ah ! what event, and of what do you speak ?' said the lady, whose bosom visibly palpitated.

'Why, of the panic experienced by M. d'Epernon, at the arrest of these gentlemen of Lorraine ?'

'They have arrested some gentlemen of Lorraine ?'

'About a score, who were found unseasonably, on the road to Vincennes.'

'Which is also the road to Soissons, a town in which M. de Guise retains a garrison, I think. Ah ! Monsieur Ernauton, you, who belong to the court, can tell me why they have arrested these gentlemen.'

'I belong to the court ?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'You know that, madame ?'

'To obtain your address, I was compelled to get information; but finish your sentence, for the love of God, you have a deplorable habitude, that of turning the conversation; and what has been the result of this unforeseen event ?'

'Absolutely nothing, madame, that I know of, at least.'

'Then why did you think I should speak of an event that has had no result ?'

'I am wrong this time, like the others, madame, and I confess my wrong.'

'How, sir ! but of what country are you ?'

'From Agen.'

'How, sir, you are a Gascon, for Agen is in Gascony, I think ?'

'Almost.'

'You are a Gascon, and you are not vain enough to suppose quite simply, that having seen you the day of the execution of Salcède, at the Saint Antoine gate, I thought you a gallant cavalier.'

Ernauton blushed and fidgetted. The lady continued imperturbably.

'That I met you in the street, and thought you handsome.'

Ernauton became purple.

'That lastly, the bearer of a message from my brother Mayenne, you came to my house, and that I found you much to my taste.'

'Madame, madame, I do not think this, God is my witness !'

'And you are wrong,' replied the lady, turning toward Ernauton for the first time, and fixing upon him two eyes, sparkling under the mask, whilst she displayed to the breathless regard of the young man, the seduction of a vaulted figure, profiled in rounded and voluptuous lines on the velvet cushions.

Ernauton clasped his hands.

'Madame ! madame !' he exclaimed, 'do you jest with me ?'

'My faith ! no,' she replied, in the same careless tone, 'I say that you pleased me, and 'tis the truth.'

'My God !'

'But have not you yourself declared to me, that you loved me ?'

'But when I dared to declare this to you, I knew not who you were, madame; and now that I know it, oh! I very humbly demand pardon of you.'

'Well, he is now getting unreasonable,' murmured the lady, impatiently. 'But rest then what you are, sir, say what you think, or you will make me regret that I am come.'

CHAPTER LIX

CONTINUATION

ERNAUTON fell on his knees. 'Speak, madame,' he said, 'speak, that I may persuade myself that all this is not a play, and perhaps I may find boldness to reply to you.'

'Well, these are my projects regarding you,' said the lady, repulsing Ernauton, whilst she arranged symmetrically the folds of her robe, 'I have a penchant towards you, but I do not yet know you. I am not in the habit of resisting my humour, but I have not the folly to commit errors. If we had been equal, I would have received you at my house, and studied you at my leisure, before you would even have suspected my intentions. On your account the thing was impossible, it was necessary to arrange it otherwise, and face the interview. Now you know how to conduct yourself towards me. Become worthy of me, 'tis all I recommend you.'

Ernauton confounded himself in protestations.

'Oh! less warmth, Monsieur de Carmainges, I beg,' said the lady, with nonchalance, 'tis not worth while; perhaps 'twas your name alone, that struck me the first time we met, and which pleased me. After all, I think, very decidedly, that my feeling towards you is only a caprice, and that it will pass off. However, do not consider yourself too far from perfection, and despair. I cannot suffer perfect individuals, Oh! I adore devoted men for example. Remember this, I allow you, my handsome cavalier.'

Ernauton was beside himself; this haughty language, these gestures, full of softness and voluptuousness, that proud superiority, that *abandon* in his presence even, of a person so illustrious, plunged him at once into the extreme of delight and terror.

He seated himself near his proud and handsome mistress, who allowed him to do so; he then attempted to pass his arm behind the cushions that supported her.

'Sir,' she said, 'it seems you heard me but did not comprehend me. No familiarity, I beg, let us each remain in our place. It is certain that one day I shall give you the right to call me yours, but this right you have not yet obtained.'

Ernauton rose up, pale and vexed.

'Excuse me, madame,' he said; 'it seems I commit nothing but follies, it is very simple: I am not yet moulded to the habitudes of Paris. With us, in the provinces, two hundred leagues hence, it is true, when a woman says, "I love," she loves and does not refuse. She makes no pretext of her words, to humble the man at her feet. 'Tis your custom as a Parisienne, 'tis your right as a princess. I accept all this. But, what would you have? I fail in the habit, but the habit will arrive to me.'

The lady listened in silence, it was plain that she continued to observe Ernauton attentively, to ascertain if his vexation would end in a real anger.

'Ah! ah! you are getting angry, I think,' she said superbly.

'I am angry indeed, madame, but it is with myself; for I have for you, madame, not a passing caprice, but love, a pure and sincere love, I do not seek your person, for I should covet you, were it so; but I seek to obtain your heart. I shall therefore never pardon myself, madame, for having to-day, by some impertinences, compromised the respect I owe you; a respect I shall not exchange for love, madame, until such time as you may order me.

'But be assured, madame, that from this moment, I await your orders.'

'Come, come,' said the lady, 'let us exaggerate nothing; Monsieur de Carmainges; you are now all ice, after being all fire.'

It seems to me, however, madame——'

'Eh! sir, never tell a woman you will love her in your own fashion, 'tis ungraceful; show her that you will love her in her own way, 'tis more gallant!'

'Tis what I said, madame.'

'Yes, but 'tis what you did not think.'

'I bow to your superiority, madame.'

'A truce to courtesy, it is repugnant to me to play the queen here. Stay, here's my hand, take it, 'tis that of a simple woman; but it is warmer and more animated than yours.'

Ernauton took respectfully the precious offering.

'Well!' said the duchess.

'Well?'

'You do not kiss it! are you mad? and have you sworn to put me in a rage?'

'But just now——'

'Just now I withdrew it from you, whilst now——'

'Now?'

'Now, I give it you.'

Ernauton kissed the hand with such fervent obedience, that it was quickly withdrawn.

'You see plainly,' said the young man, 'another lesson!'

'I did wrong then?'

Assuredly you made me jump from one extreme to the other; the fear will end by extinguishing the passion. I shall continue to adore you on my knees, 'tis true; but I shall have for you neither love nor confidence.'

'Ah! I would not have it so,' said the lady, in a gay tone, 'for you would be but a sorrowful lover, and it is not thus I love, I assure you. No, rest natural, be yourself, be M. Ernauton de Carmainges, nothing more. I have my follies. Eh! my God! have you not yourself told me, I am handsome? Every pretty woman has her mania, respect them much, face some of them, especially do not fear me, and when I say to the effervescing Ernauton, "Calm yourself," let him consult my eyes, never my voice.' At these words she rose.

It was time: the young man, rendered delirious, had seized her in his arms, and the mask of the duchess grazed for a moment the lips of Ernauton; but it was now she proved the whole truth of what she had said; for, through her mask, her eyes flashed, like the cold white streak that precedes the storm.

This glance so imposed on Carmainges, that his arms dropped, and his warmth cooled.

'Come,' said the duchess, 'tis well, we shall meet again. Decidedly you please me, Monsieur de Carmainges.'

Ernauton bowed.

'When are you at liberty ?' she inquired negligently.

'Alas ! but very rarely, madame,' replied Ernauton.

'Ah ! yes, I understand, this service is fatiguing, is it not ?'

'What service ?'

'Why, that you perform near the King. Do you not belong to some guard of His Majesty ?'

'That is, madame, that I form a part of a corps of gentlemen.'

'That is what I mean, and these gentlemen are Gascons, I believe.'

'Yes, all, madame.'

'How many are they then ? I have heard, but I forget.'

'Forty-five.'

'What a singular number.'

'It is so.'

'Is it a calculation ?'

'I do not think so; chance may be charged with the addition.'

'And these forty-five gentlemen, do not quit the King, you say ?'

'I did not say that we do not quit the King, madame.'

'Oh ! pardon, I thought I had heard you say so. At least you said you had but little liberty.'

'It's true, I have but little liberty, madame, because, during the day, we are on service, in case the King should go out for a drive, or to hunt; and that at night, we are consigned to the Louvre.'

'At night ?'

'Yes.'

'Every night ?'

'Nearly every night.'

'See then what would have happened, if to-night, for example, this order had retained you ! I, who awaited you, I, who would have been ignorant of the motive that prevented your coming, should I not have believed that my advances were despised ?'

'Oh ! madame, now to see you I will risk all, I swear to you.'

'It is useless, and would be absurd, I do not wish it.'

'But then ?'

'Perform your service; 'tis for me to arrange the rest, I who am quite free.'

'Ah ! what kindness, madame !'

'But all this does not explain to me,' said the duchess, with her insinuating smile, 'how this evening you are free, and how you came here.'

'This evening I had already meditated requesting permission from M. de Loignac, our captain, who wishes me well, when an order arrived to give the whole night to the Forty-Five.'

'Ah ! this order arrived.'

'Yes.'

'And on what account was this good luck ?'

'As a recompense, I believe, madame, for a service, somewhat fatiguing, performed by us yesterday at Vincennes.'

'Ah ! very well,' said the duchess.

'This then, madame, is the circumstance to which I am indebted for the happiness of seeing you to-night, quite at my ease.'

'Well ! listen, Carmainges,' said the duchess, with a sweet familiarity that filled the heart of the young man with joy; 'this is what you have to do; every time you are free, apprise the hostess by a note ; every day one of my men shall call here.'

'Oh ! mon Dieu ! but 'tis too much kindness, madame.'

The duchess placed her hand on Ernauton's arm.

'Attend then,' she said.

'What is it, madame ?'

'That noise, from whence comes it ?'

In fact, the sound of spurs, voices, knocking at doors, joyful exclamations, ascended from the lower hall, like the echo of an invasion.

Ernauton passed his head outside the door that led to the antechamber.

'They are my companions,' he said, 'who come here to spend the holiday given them by M. de Loignac.'

'But by what chance—here, precisely in the hotel in which we are ?'

'Because it is precisely at the Proud Chevalier, madame, that the rendezvous for the arrival was given ; because from this happy day of their entrance into the capital, my friends have held in affection the wines and pasties of Maître Fournichon, and some even the little towers of madame.'

'Oh !' said the duchess, with a malicious smile, 'you speak very expertly of these little turrets, sir.'

‘Tis the first time, on my honour, that it has happened to me to enter one of them, madame. But you—you who have chosen them? dare it be said?’

‘I have chosen, and you will easily understand this. I have chosen the most deserted place in Paris, a spot near the river, near the grand rampart, a spot where no one would recognise me, nor suspect that I should go; but my God! why your companions are noisy!’ added the duchess.

In fact, the hubbub of the entry had become an infernal hurricane; the noise of the exploits of the eve, the romancing, the sound of gold crown pieces, and the clicking of glasses, augured a formidable and complete storm.

On a sudden the sound of steps was heard on the little staircase which led to the turret; and the voice of Dame Fournichon cried from below:—

‘Monsieur de Sainte Maline! Monsieur de Sainte Maline!’

‘Well!’ replied the voice of the young man.

‘Do not go above, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, I entreat you.’

‘Capital! and why not, my dear Madame Fournichon? is not the whole house our own, to-night?’

‘The whole house, certainly, but not the turrets.’

‘Bah! the turrets are part of the house,’ cried five or six other voices; amongst which Ernauton distinguished those of Perducas de Pincornay and Eustache de Miradoux.

‘No, the towers are not a part of it,’ continued Dame Fournichon, ‘the towers are an exception, the towers are my own, do not disturb my lodgers.’

‘Madame Fournichon,’ said Sainte Maline, ‘I am your lodger also, therefore do not disturb me.’

‘Sainte Maline!’ murmured Ernauton, uneasy, for he knew the bad propensities and the audacity of this man.

‘But for pity’s sake!’ repeated Madame Fournichon.

‘Madame Fournichon,’ said Sainte Maline, ‘it is midnight; at nine o’clock every fire ought to be extinguished, and I see a fire in your turret; it is only bad servants of the King who transgress the orders of the King; I wish to know who are these unworthy servants.’

And Sainte Maline continued to ascend, followed by several Gascons, whose steps kept pace with his own.

‘My God!’ exclaimed the duchess, ‘my God!’

Monsieur de Carmainges, will these men dare to enter here ?'

'At all events, madame, if they dare, I am here, and I can say to you beforehand, madame, have not the slightest fear.'

'Ah ! but they will break open the doors, sir.'

In fact, Sainte Maline, too far advanced to draw back, knocked so violently at the door that it broke in two; it was from a sapling which Madame Fournichon had not thought it proper to prove—she whose respect for *les amours*, approached fanaticism.

CHAPTER LX

HOW SAINTE MALINE ENTERED THE TURRET, AND OF WHAT FOLLOWED

THE first care of Ernauton, when he found the door of the antechamber give way under the attack of Sainte Maline, was to blow out the candle which lighted the turret.

This precaution, which although momentary, was prudent, did not however calm the duchess, when suddenly Dame Fournichon, who had exhausted all her resources, had recourse to a last attempt, and began crying out :—

'Monsieur de Sainte Maline, I warn you that the persons you disturb, are your friends; necessity forces me to avow it.'

'Well ! the greater reason why we should present our compliments to them,' said Perducas de Pincornay, in a voice thick from the effects of wine, and stumbling behind Sainte Maline on the last step of the staircase.

'And who are these friends ? Come,' said Sainte Maline.

'Yes, who are they ? who are they ?' cried Eustache de Miradoux.

The worthy hostess, still hoping to prevent the collision which might, whilst doing honour to the Proud Chevalier, most seriously affect the Rose-tree of Love, ascended amongst the crowded ranks of gentlemen, and gently whispered the name of Ernauton into the ear of his aggressor.

'Ernauton !' repeated aloud Sainte Maline, to whom

this revelation was oil instead of water cast on the fire, 'Ernauton ! 'tis not possible.'

'And why so ?' demanded Madame Fournichon.

'Yes, why so ?' repeated several voices.

'Eh ! pardieu !' said Sainte Maline, 'because Ernauton is a model of chastity, an example of continence, a collection of all the virtues. No, no, you are mistaken, Dame Fournichon, it is not M. de Carmainges, who is shut in there.'

And he approached towards the second door, to do the same as he had for the first, when suddenly the door opened, and Ernauton appeared on the step, with a countenance that announced that patience was not one of the virtues he so religiously practised, as affirmed by Sainte Maline.

'By what right has M. de Sainte Maline broken this door ?' he said, 'and having broken that one, does he wish to break this ?'

'Eh ! 'tis him in reality; 'tis M. Ernauton,' exclaimed Sainte Maline, 'I recognise his voice; for as to his person, the devil fetch me if I can say, in the obscurity, of what colour it is.'

'You do not reply to my question, sir,' reiterated Ernauton.

Sainte Maline set up a loud laugh which reassured those of the Forty-Five who had judged it expedient to descend a couple of steps.

'Tis to you I am speaking, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, do you understand me ?' exclaimed Ernauton.

'Yes, sir, perfectly,' replied the former.

'What is your reply then ?'

'I have to reply, my dear companion, that we wish to know if it is you who inhabit this hostelry of the loves.'

'Well ! now, sir, that you have satisfied yourself it is me, since I am speaking to you, and if necessary, could touch you, leave me at peace.'

'Cap de Dieu,' said Sainte Maline, 'you are not become a hermit, and you do not live alone, I suppose ?'

'As to that, sir, you will permit me to leave you in doubt, supposing you are so.'

'Ah ! bah !' said Sainte Maline, endeavouring to pass into the tower, 'are you really alone ? Ah ! you are without a light; bravo.'

'Come, gentlemen,' said Ernauton, in a haughty tone,

'I admit that you are drunk, and I forgive you; but there is a term even to patience allowed to men who have lost their senses; your jests are exhausted, eh? do me the pleasure then to retire.'

Unfortunately Saint Maline was in one of his fits of jealous wickedness.

'Oh! oh! retire,' he said, 'how you say that to us, Monsieur Ernauton!'

'I tell it you in such a manner that you may not deceive yourself as to my desire, Monsieur de Sainte Maline, and if necessary, I repeat it; retire, gentlemen, I beg.'

'Ah! not before you have admitted us to the honour of saluting the person for whom you desert our company.'

At this obstinacy of Sainte Maline, the circle about to break up, again formed round him.

'Monsieur de Montcrabeau,' said Sainte Maline authoritatively, 'descend and bring up a candle.'

'Monsieur de Montcrabeau,' exclaimed Ernauton, 'if you do so, remember that you will personally insult me.'

Montcrabeau hesitated, so menacing was the voice of the young man.

'Good,' replied Sainte Maline, 'we have our oath, and M. de Carmainges is so religious in discipline that he would not infringe it; we cannot draw the sword one against the other, so the light, Montcrabeau, the light.'

Montcrabeau descended, and in five minutes, remounted with a candle, which he offered to Sainte Maline.

'No, no,' said the latter, 'keep it, I may perhaps have occasion for my two hands.' And Sainte Maline made a step in advance to penetrate to the little tower.

'I take you as witnesses, as many of you as are here,' said Ernauton, 'that I am basely insulted and am offered violence without a cause, and that in consequence'—Ernauton suddenly drew out his sword—'I shall bury this sword in the breast of the first who advances another step.'

Sainte Maline, furious, prepared also to unsheathe his sword, but he had not half drawn it, when he saw the point of Ernauton's sword sparkling at his breast.

Now as at this moment he made a step in advance, without M. de Carmainges having the trouble to stoop, or extend his arm, Sainte Maline felt the cold iron, and recoiled, raving like a wounded bull.

Ernauton then stepped forward as Sainte Maline stepped backward, and his sword again held its threatening attitude at the breast of the latter.

Sainte Maline turned pale; if Ernauton had but stooped, he would have nailed him to the wall.

He gently replaced the sword in the sheath.

'You deserve a thousand deaths for your insolence, sir,' said Ernauton; 'but the oath of which you have just spoken binds me, and I shall touch you no further; leave me a free passage.'

He made a step backwards to see if he was obeyed, and with a noble gesture that would have done honour to a king,—

'Aside, gentlemen,' he said, 'come, madame, I will answer for everything.'

There was now seen to appear on the threshold of the turret, a woman whose head was covered with a coiffe, her face concealed under a mask and veil, and who tremblingly accepted the arm of Ernauton.

The young man then replaced his sword in the scabbard, and certain of having nothing more to fear, he proudly crossed the antechamber, peopled with his companions, who were both curious and uneasy.

Sainte Maline, whose bosom had been slightly touched with the sword, had retreated as far as the landing, choking with the merited affront he had received before his companions and the unknown lady.

He saw that all would unite against him, men both grave and gay, if things remained between him and Ernauton in the state they were; this conviction drove him to a last extremity.

He drew his dagger at the moment Carmainges passed before him.

Had he intended to strike Carmainges? Had he simply intended to do what he did? this it would be impossible to ascertain, without being enabled to read the inmost heart of this man, in which perhaps he himself could not read in his moments of anger.

At all events his arm fell upon the couple, and the blade of his poniard, instead of entering the breast of Ernauton, cut through the silk hood of the duchess, and divided one of the fastenings of her mask.

The mask fell to the ground.

The movement of Sainte Maline had been so rapid,

that, in the darkness, no one had noticed it, no one had opposed it.

The duchess uttered a cry. Her mask had abandoned her, and along her neck, she had felt the cold slide of the round back of the blade, which however had not wounded her.

Sainte Maline, therefore, whilst Ernauton was disturbed at the cry uttered by the duchess, had time enough to pick up the mask and restore it to her, so that by the light of Montrabeau's candle, he could remark the features of the young female, which nothing protected.

'Ah ! ah !' he said, in his insolent and bantering tone; 'tis the pretty dame of the litter; my compliments, Ernauton, you go quickly to the work.'

Ernauton stopped, and had already half drawn his sword from the sheath, which he repented having replaced in it, when the duchess drew him along the step, saying quietly,—

'Come, come, I entreat you, Monsieur de Carmainges.'

'We shall meet again, Monsieur de Maline,' said Ernauton, moving away, 'and be assured you shall pay me for this baseness with the others.'

'Right, right !' said Sainte Maline, 'keep your own accounts. I will keep mine; we will settle them all at once.'

Carmainges heard, but did not even turn round, he was wholly engrossed with the duchess.

Arrived at the bottom of the staircase, no one opposed his further passage; those of the Forty-Five who had not mounted the staircase, blamed, no doubt, the violence of their comrades,

Ernauton conducted the duchess to her litter, guarded by two attendants.

Arrived there, and feeling herself in safety, the duchess pressed the hand of Carmainges, and said to him,—

'Monsieur Ernauton, after what has taken place, after the insult from which, in spite of your courage, you were unable to defend me, and which will not fail to be renewed, we cannot return here; find, I beg you, in the neighbourhood, some house for sale, or to be let entire; before long, be assured, you shall receive news of me.'

'Must I take leave of you, madame ?' said Ernauton, bowing in sign of obedience to the orders just given him, and which were too flattering to his pride to discuss them.

'Not yet, Monsieur de Carmainges, not yet; follow my litter as far as the new bridge, lest this miserable, who recognised me as the lady of the litter, but who has not recognised me for the person I am, may walk behind us, and thus discover my residence.'

Ernauton obeyed, but no one watched them.

Arrived at the Pont-Neuf, which then deserved this name, as it was scarcely seven years since the architect Ducereau had thrown it across the Seine; arrived at the Pont-Neuf, the duchess tendered her hand to the lips of Ernauton, saying to him,—

'Now, sir, go.'

'May I be bold enough to inquire when I shall again see you, madame ?'

'That depends upon the haste you employ in executing my commission; and this haste will serve me more or less, as a proof of your desire to see me again.'

'Oh ! in that case, madame, rely upon me.'

'Tis well; go, my knight.'

And the duchess a second time presented her hand to Ernauton to kiss, and departed.

'Tis strange, really,' said the young man, returning, 'this woman has a fancy for me, I cannot doubt it, and she disturbs herself not the least in the world, whether or not I may be killed by this ruffian, Sainte Maline.'

And a slight movement of the shoulders proved that the young man estimated this indifference at its proper value.

Then returning to the first sentiment which had nothing very flattering to his pride :

'Oh !' he continued, 'she was indeed greatly alarmed, the poor woman, and the fear of being compromised is, amongst princesses especially, the strongest of all feelings.'

'For,' he added, smiling to himself, 'she is a princess.'

And as the last sentiment was the most flattering to himself, it had the advantage.

But this sentiment could not efface with Carmainges the remembrance of the insult that had been offered him; he returned therefore straight to the hostelry, to allow no one the right of supposing that he had any fear of the consequences of this affair.

He had naturally decided to infringe every consign and every oath possible, and to finish with Sainte Maline

at the first word he might utter, or the first sign he allowed himself to make.

Love and pride wounded, by the same blow, urged his bravery to such a pitch that he would certainly, in the state of excitement he was in, have been almost a match for half a score of men.

This resolution sparkled in his eye, when he touched the doorstep of the hostelry of the Proud Chevalier.

Madame Fournichon, who awaited his return with anxiety, was standing all of a tremble in the doorway.

At the sight of Ernauton, she wiped her eyes, as though she had wept a liberal shower of tears, and throwing her two hands round the neck of the young man, she demanded pardon, despite all the efforts of her husband, who pretended, that not being in the wrong his wife had no pardon to solicit.

The worthy hostess was not so disagreeable that Carmainges, had he to complain of her, could obstinately retain any rancour towards her, he therefore assured Madame Fournichon that he had no leaven of anger towards her, and that her wine alone was guilty.

This was an opinion that the husband appeared to understand, and for which, by a sign with his head, he thanked Ernauton.

Whilst these matters were taking place at the door, every one was at table, and they were discoursing warmly of the event, which, without contradiction, formed the culminating point of the evening.

Many considered Sainte Maline in the wrong, with that frankness which is the principal character of Gascons when conversing amongst themselves.

Many abstained, observing the knitted brow of their companion, and his lip pinched in with some profound reflection.

For the rest, they attacked with no less enthusiasm, the supper of Maître Fournichon, but they philosophised whilst attacking, that's all.

'As for me,' said M. Hector de Biran aloud, 'I know that M. de Sainte Maline is wrong, and if my name, for a moment, was Ernauton de Carmainges, M. de Sainte Maline would, at this hour, be stretched on this table, instead of being seated before it.'

Sainte Maline raised his head and looked at Hector de Biran.

'I say what I say,' replied the latter, 'and stay, yonder on the doorstep is some one, who seems to coincide in opinion with me.'

Every eye was turned towards the spot indicated by the young gentleman, and they observed Carmainges, pale and upright, standing in the doorway.

At this sight, which looked like an apparition, each felt a shudder run through his body.

Ernauton descended from the threshold, like the statue of a commander from his pedestal, and walked straight to Sainte Maline, without much perceptible anger, but with a firmness which caused more than one heart to beat.

Upon this, they cried from all parts to M. de Carmainges: 'Come here, Ernauton; come this side, Carmainges, here's room near me.'

'Thank you,' replied the young man, 'tis near M. de Sainte Maline I wish to sit.'

Sainte Maline rose; every eye was fixed upon him.

But in the movement he made in rising his features completely changed their expression.

'I will resign you the place you desire, sir,' he said, without anger, 'and in yielding it, I shall offer you my excuses, very frank and very sincere, for my stupid aggression just now; I was drunk, you said so yourself, pardon me.'

This declaration, made in the midst of the general silence, did not satisfy Ernauton, though it was evident that not a syllable had been lost for the Forty-Five convives, who regarded with some anxiety the termination of this scene.

But at the last words of Sainte Maline, the cries of joy of his companions showed Ernauton that he ought to appear satisfied, and that he was fully avenged.

His good sense therefore enjoined him to be silent.

At the same time, a glance thrown at Sainte Maline, convinced him that he must mistrust him more than ever.

'The miserable is brave, however,' said Ernauton quietly to himself, 'and if he yields at this moment, 'tis in consequence of some odious combination which better satisfies him.'

The glass of Sainte Maline was full; he filled that of Ernauton.

'Come, come! peace, peace!' exclaimed every voice,

at the reconciliation of de Carmainges and de Sainte Maline.

Carmainges profited by the shock of glasses and the noise of voices, and inclining towards Sainte Maline, with a smile on his lips that they might not suspect the sense of the words he addressed to him :—

‘Monsieur de Sainte Maline,’ he said, ‘this is the second time you have insulted me without giving me reparation; take care; at the third insult I will slay you like a dog.’

‘Do so, sir, if you think it worth while,’ replied Sainte Maline, ‘for on the faith of a gentleman, in your place, I would do the same.’

And the two mortal enemies jingled their glasses, as two of the best friends would have done.

CHAPTER LXI

WHAT TOOK PLACE IN THE MYSTERIOUS HOUSE

WHILST the hostelry of the Proud Chevalier, in which apparently there reigned the most perfect concord, allowed to penetrate, with closed doors but open cellars, through the crevices of the window shutters, the blaze of wax-lights and the merriment of its guests, an unusual movement was going forward in that mysterious house, which our readers have only seen exteriorly in the pages of this narrative.

The attendant with the bald head, went to and fro from one chamber to another, carrying here and there articles packed up, which he enclosed in a travelling chest.

These first preparations terminated, he loaded a pistol, and tried in its velvet sheath a large poniard; he then suspended it by means of a chain which served him as a belt, to which he attached, in addition, his pistol, a bunch of keys, and a prayer-book bound in black shagreen.

Whilst he was thus occupied, a light step like that of a spirit, grazed the floor of the first landing, and glided down the staircase.

Suddenly, a woman, pale and looking like a phantom under the folds of her white veil, appeared on the threshold

of the door, and a voice, gentle and sad as the chirp of a bird in the grove, was heard.

'Remy,' said this voice, 'are you ready?'

'Yes, madame, and I am now only waiting for your casket, to join it to mine.'

'Do you think then that these boxes can be easily loaded on the horses?'

'I will answer for it, madame; besides, if you are at all uneasy about it, we can dispense with carrying mine, have I not yonder all I require?'

'No, Remy, no; under no pretence; I would not have you want necessaries on the road; and then, once there, the poor old man being ill, all the domestics will be occupied with him. Oh! Remy, I am in haste to rejoin my father: I have sad presentiments, and it seems to me an age since I have seen him.'

'And yet, madame,' said Remy, 'you quitted him three months since, and there is no greater interval between this journey and the last, than between the others.'

'Remy, you who are so good a physician, did you not admit to me yourself, on quitting him the last time, that my father had not long to live?'

'Yes, undoubtedly, but it was a fear expressed, and not a prediction made: the Almighty sometimes forgets old men, and they live, 'tis a strange saying, from the habit of living; moreover, an old man is sometimes like a child, ill to-day, cheerful to-morrow.'

'Alas! Remy, and like the child also, the old man, cheerful to-day, is a corpse to-morrow.'

Remy did not reply, for no consoling reply could really issue from his mouth, and a gloomy silence succeeded for some minutes to the dialogue we have reported.

Both of the speakers, remained in their thoughtful and gloomy position.

'For what hour have you ordered the horses, Remy?' at length said the mysterious lady.

'At two hours after midnight.'

'One o'clock is now striking?'

'Yes, madame.'

'No one is spying outside, Remy?'

'No one.'

'Not even that unhappy young man?'

'Not even him!'

Remy sighed.

'You tell me this in a strange fashion, Remy ?'

'Yes, for he likewise has taken a resolution.'

'How so ?' demanded the lady shuddering.

'To see us no more, or at least, no longer to attempt to see us.'

'And where is he going ?'

'Where we are all going : to repose.'

'May God give him an eternal one,' replied the lady, in a voice as serious and as cold as a death knell; 'and yet——' she stopped.

'And yet ?' repeated Remy.

'Had he nothing to do in this world ?'

'He had to love, if they would have loved him.'

'A man of his name, of his rank, and of his age, might reckon upon the future.'

'Do you reckon upon it, madame, who are of an age, a rank, and a name which has nothing to envy in his ?'

The eyes of the lady shot forth a sinister flash.

'Yes, Remy,' she said, 'I do reckon upon it, since I live; but stay then.' She listened.

'Is it not the trot of a horse I hear ?'

'Yes, I think so.'

'Is it already our conductor ?'

'Tis possible; but if so, he has anticipated the appointment by nearly an hour.'

'It stops at the door, Remy.'

'It does indeed.'

Remy descended hastily, and arrived at the bottom of the staircase, at the moment that three knocks, rapidly given, were heard.

'Who is there ?' demanded Remy.

'Me,' replied a broken and trembling voice; 'me, Grandchamp, the valet de chambre of the baron.'

'Oh ! my God ! you, Grandchamp, you at Paris ! wait till I open, but speak low.'

And he opened the door.

'From whence do you come then ?' inquired Remy softly.

'From Meridor.'

'From Meridor ?'

'Yes, dear Monsieur Remy, alas !'

'Come in, come in quick, oh ! my God !'

'Well ! Remy,' said the voice of the lady from the top of the staircase, 'are they our horses ?'

'No, madame, it is not them.'

And turning to the old man :—

'What is the matter, my good Grandchamp ?'

'You do not surmise ?' replied the servitor.

'Alas ! yes, I surmise; but, in the name of Heaven, do not announce this news to her suddenly. Ah ! what will she say, the poor woman ?'

'Remy, Remy,' said the voice, 'I think you are talking with some one ?'

'Yes, madame, yes.'

'With some one whose voice I recognise.'

'Yes, madame; how break it to her, Grandchamp ? she is here.'

The lady, descended from the first landing to the ground floor, as she had descended from the second to the first, appeared at the extremity of the corridor.

'Who is there ?' she demanded, 'one would think it was Grandchamp.'

'Yes, madame, 'tis me,' humbly and sorrowfully replied the old man, uncovering his white head.

'Grandchamp, you ! oh ! mon Dieu ! my presentiments have not deceived me, my father is dead.'

'Such is the fact, madame,' replied Grandchamp, forgetting all the recommendations of Remy, 'and Meridor is now without a master.'

Pale, frozen, but motionless and firm, the lady supported the blow, without giving effect to her pent up grief.

Remy, seeing her so resigned and so gloomy, took her gently by the hand.

'How did he die ?' inquired the lady; 'tell me, my friend.'

'Madame, Monsieur the Baron, who never quitted his fauteuil, was visited a week ago with a third attack of apoplexy. He was enabled for a last time to murmur your name, he then ceased to speak, and in the night he died.'

Diana made a sign of thanks to the old servitor, and without adding another word, she remounted to her chamber.

'At length she is free,' murmured Remy, more ghostlike and more pale than herself; 'come, Grandchamp, come.'

The chamber of the lady was situate on the first landing, behind a cabinet, which looked upon the street, whilst

the chamber itself received no other light, than from a small window looking into a court.

The furniture of the room was sombre, but rich; the drapery of arras tapestry, the best of the period, represented the different subjects of the Passion.

A prie-Dieu of sculptured oak, a stall of the same material, and the same workmanship, a bedstead with twisted posts, with hangings similar to those of the walls; lastly, a carpet from Bruges, these were the whole ornaments of the room.

Not a flower, not a jewel, not a gilding; wood and bronze replaced everywhere silver and gold; a frame of black wood enclosed the portrait of a man, and placed in a niche of the wall, upon which fell the light from the window, evidently arranged to give it light.

It was before this portrait, that the lady knelt, with a bursting heart, but unmoistened eyes.

She fixed on this inanimate figure a long and indescribable look of love, as though this noble image was about to live again and speak to her.

A noble image, indeed, and the epithet seemed made for her.

The painter had represented a young man, from twenty-eight to thirty years of age, extended, partly undressed, upon a couch; from his half-exposed bosom there still trickled a few drops of blood; his right hand hung mutilated, and yet it still held the stump of a sword.

His eyes were closed, like those of a man about to die; the pallor and sufferings gave to this physiognomy a holy character, which the face of man only commences to assume at the moment he is about to quit the world for eternity.

The only legend, the only device was written under the portrait in letters, red like blood :—

Aut Cæsar aut nihil.

The lady extended her hand towards the image, and addressing it, as she would the Almighty :—

‘I had supplicated thee to wait, althought thy irritated soul was thirsty for vengeance,’ she said; ‘and as the dead see all, oh ! my love, thou hast seen that I have only supported life that I might not become a parricide; thou dead, I ought to have died, but in dying I should have killed my father.’

'And besides, thou knowest it, on thy bloody corpse; I made a vow, I had sworn to pay death for death, blood for blood; but at that time I charged with a crime, the whitened head of the venerable old man who called me his innocent child.

'Thou hast waited, thank thee, dear loved one, thou hast waited, and now I am free, the last link that bound me to earth has been broken by the Seigneur, to the Seigneur my thanks are rendered. I am wholly thine; no more concealment, no more ambush, I can act in open day; for now, I shall leave no one behind me on the earth, I have the right to quit it.'

She raised herself on her knee, and kissed the hand, which seemed to hang outside the frame.

'Thou wilt pardon me, friend,' she said, 'my eyes being dry; 'tis by weeping on your tomb, that my eyes are become barren, those eyes you loved so much.

'In a few months I shall rejoin thee, and thou wilt answer me at length, dear shade, to whom I have so often spoke, without obtaining a reply.'

At these words, Diana rose respectfully, as if she had finished discoursing with her God, and seated herself in the oaken stall.

'Poor father,' she murmured in a cold tone, and with an expression which seemed to belong to no human creature.

She now fell into a sombre reverie, which apparently drove from her remembrance her past, as well as present misfortunes.

Suddenly she stood up, her hand resting on the arm of the fauteuil,—

'That is it,' she said, 'and thus all will be well. Remy !'

The faithful attendant had probably been listening at the door, for he appeared immediately.

'Here I am, madame,' he replied.

'My worthy friend, my brother,' said Diana, 'you—the only creature who knows me in this world—say adieu to me.'

'And why so, madame ?'

'Because the hour is come for us to separate, Remy.'

'Separate !' exclaimed the young man, with an accent that made his companion tremble; 'what do you say, madame ?'

'Yes, Remy, this project of vengeance appeared to me noble and pure, whilst there was an obstacle between him and me, and whilst I only perceived the horizon; thus are the things of this world, grand and beautiful at a distance. Now that I touch the execution, now that the obstacle is removed, I do not recoil, Remy; but I would not drag in my train, in the road to crime, a soul, generous and without a stain: therefore, my friend, you will quit me; this long life passed in tears will be accounted to me as an expiation before God and before man; and it will, I hope, be also accounted to you, who never have done and never will do an injury, you will be doubly sure of heaven.'

Remy had listened to the words of the lady of Mon-soreau with a gloomy and almost haughty air.

'Madame,' he replied, 'do you imagine yourself speaking to an old man, trembling and crippled from the abuse of life? madame, I am twenty-six, that is, I have all the sap of youth, which seems dried up within me, a corpse snatched from the tomb; if I still live, 'tis for the accomplishment of some terrible action, it is to play an active part in the work of Providence; separate not my thoughts from yours, madame, since each of our sinister thoughts have so long dwelt under the same roof. Where you go, I shall go; in what you do, I shall aid you; unless, madame, and if, despite my prayers, you persist in this resolution to drive me——'

'Oh!' murmured the young woman, 'drive you away! what a word you have spoken there, Remy!'

'If you persist in this resolution,' continued the young man, as though she had not spoken, 'I know what I have to do, and all my studies, become useless, will end in two thrusts of a poniard; one that I shall give in the heart of him you know, the other in my own.'

'Remy, Remy,' exclaimed Diana, making a step towards the young man, and raising her hand majestically above her head; 'Remy, say not so, the life of him you threaten does not belong to you, it is mine; I have paid dear enough for it to take it myself, when the moment he must lose it shall arrive; you know what has happened, Remy, and it is no dream, I swear to you; the day I kneeled before the corpse, already cold, of him——'

And she indicated the portrait.

'That day, I repeat, I approached my lips to the lips

of the wound you see open, and those lips trembled while saying to me :—

“Avenge me, Diana, avenge me.”

‘Madame ?’

‘Remy, I repeat to you, it was not an illusion, it was not a fancy of my delirium; the wound spoke, spoke, I tell you; and I still hear it murmur—

“Avenge me, Diana, avenge me.”’

The attendant bent down his head.

‘The vengeance, therefore, is mine, not yours,’ continued Diana; ‘besides, for whom, and by whom, did he die ? Through me, and for me.’

‘I must obey you, madame,’ replied Remy, ‘for I was as lifeless as himself, Who had me carried off from the midst of those bodies, with which this room was strewn ? you; who concealed me ? you ; who healed me of my wounds ? you; you, the other moiety of the soul of him for whom I would have died so gladly; command then, I shall obey, provided you command me not to quit you.’

‘Be it so, Remy; follow my fortunes then; you are right, nothing ought now to separate us.’

Remy pointed to the portrait.

‘Now, madame,’ he said energetically, ‘he was slain by treason; it is by treason he must be avenged. Oh ! you know not one thing, you are right, the hand of God is with us; you know not that this night, I have found the secret of the *aqua tofano*, that poison of the Medicis, the poison of Renè the Florentine.’

‘Oh ! do you say true ?’

‘Come and see, madame; come and see.’

‘But Grandchamp, who is waiting, what will he say at not seeing us return ? at no longer hearing us ? for ’tis below, is it not, that you wish to take me ?’

‘The poor old man has ridden sixty leagues, madame; he is exhausted with fatigue, and is gone to sleep on my bed. Come.’

Diana followed Remy.

CHAPTER LXII

THE LABORATORY

REMY led the unknown lady into the adjoining room, and touching a spring concealed in a plank of the floor, he loosened a trap-door which extended from the middle of the room to the wall.

This door, when opened, discovered a staircase, gloomy, steep, and narrow; Remy entered it the first, and presented his hand to Diana, who leaned upon it, and descended after him.

Twenty steps of this staircase, or rather of this ladder, conducted them to a circular cave, black and humid; all the furniture of which, consisted in a furnace with its immense hearth, a square table, two rush chairs, a quantity of phials, and iron boxes.

The only inhabitants were a goat, deprived of the power of bleating, and birds, deprived of their voices, which seemed, in this dark and subterranean place, like the spectres of animals to which they had a resemblance, and not the animals themselves.

In the furnace the remains of a fire was dying away, whilst a thick and black smoke silently made its escape by a pipe inserted in the wall.

An alembic, placed upon the hearth, suffered to filtrate slowly, and drop by drop, a liquor as yellow as gold.

These drops fell into a phial of white glass, two fingers thick, but, at the same time, of the most perfect transparency, and which was closed by the tube of the alembic which communicated with it.

Diana descended, and stood still in the midst of all these objects, of strange forms and existences, without astonishment, and without fear; it seemed as if the ordinary impressions of life had no longer any influence upon this woman, who already existed *out of life*.

Remy signed to her to remain at the foot of the staircase; which she did.

The young man lighted a lamp, which threw a livid glare over the objects we have detailed, and which, until now, slept, or moved, in the dark.

He then approached a well dug in the cave, touching

the partitions of one of the walls, and which had neither parapet nor margin, fastened a bucket to a long rope, and dropped the rope without a pulley, into the water which slumbered calmly at the bottom of this funnel, and which returned a dull, rattling sound; he then drew up the bucket full of water, as cold and pure as crystal.

'Approach, madame,' said Remy. Diana approached.

Into this enormous quantity of water, he dropped a single drop of the liquid, contained in the glass phial, and the entire mass of water instantly turned to a yellow colour; this colour then evaporated, and the water, in about ten minutes, became as transparent as before.

The fixedness of Diana's eyes, alone gave an idea of the attention she paid to this operation.

Remy regarded her.

'Well!' demanded the lady.

'Well! now dip in the water,' said Remy, 'which has neither taste nor colour, a flower, a glove, a handkerchief, rub with this water some scented soap, pour some into a basin in which the hands, the teeth, or the face are washed, and you will see, as was seen at the court of Charles the Ninth, the flower stifle with its perfume, the glove poison by its contact, the soap kill by its introduction to the pores. Pour a single drop of this pure oil upon the wick of a candle or a lamp, the cotton will be impregnated with it for nearly an inch; and for an hour, the candle or the lamp, will exhale death, and afterwards burn as innocently as any other lamp or candle.'

'You are sure of what you say, Remy?' inquired the lady.

'All these experiments I have made, madame; look at those birds which can no longer sleep, and would no longer eat; they have drank water similar to this water; see that goat, which has browsed on the grass, watered with this same water, she bleats, and her eyes wander; we might easily set her at liberty, but her life is condemned unless that nature, to which we should restore her, reveals to her instinct some of those antidotes to poisons, which the animals discover, but which men are ignorant of.'

'May I see this phial, Remy?' said Diana.

'Yes, madame, for all the liquid is now precipitated; but wait.'

Remy separated it from the alembic with infinite

precaution; he then immediately corked it with a plug of soft wax, which he flattened over the orifice, and enveloping this orifice in a morsel of wool, he presented the flask to his companion.

Diana took it without any emotion, raised it on a level with the lamp, and after observing for some time the thick liquid it contained—

‘It is sufficient,’ she said; ‘when the time arrives, we will choose a bouquet, gloves, a lamp, soap, or a wash-hand basin, will the liquor keep in metal?’

‘It will rust it.’

‘But this phial will probably break?’

‘I do not think so; look at the thickness of the crystal; besides, we can enclose it, or rather envelope it in a gold case.’

‘Then you are content, Remy, are you not?’

And something like a pale smile appeared on the lips of the female, and gave them that reflection of life that the moon’s ray gives to a benumbed object.

‘More than I ever was, madame,’ replied the latter; ‘to punish the wicked, is to enjoy the highest prerogative of God.’

‘Listen, Remy, listen.’

And the lady waited.

‘Did you hear any noise?’

‘The neighing of horses in the street; I think, Remy, our horses are arrived.’

‘Tis probable, madame, for ’tis nearly the hour at which they ought to come, but now, I shall send them back.’

‘Why so?’

‘Are they not useless?’

‘Instead of going to Meridor, we will go to Flanders; keep the horses.’

‘Ah! I comprehend.’

And from the eyes of the servitor, in their turn, escaped a flash of joy, which could only be compared to the smile of Diana.

‘But Grandchamp,’ he added, ‘what shall we do with him?’

‘Grandchamp has need of repose; I have told you so. He shall remain at Paris, and sell this house, which is of no further use to us. But you shall restore to liberty all these poor innocent animals, which we have made to

suffer from necessity.' You have observed; God will perhaps provide for their health.'

'But all these furnaces, retorts, alembics?'

'Since they were here when we purchased the house, what matters it that others find them after us?'

'But these powders, these acids, and essences?'

'To the fire, Remy, to the fire.'

'Remove yourself, then, a little.'

'Me?'

'Yes, or at least put on this mask of glass.'

And Remy presented to Diana a mask, which she placed over her face.

And applying to his mouth and nose a large pad of wool, he pressed the cord of the forge, revived the flames of the charcoal; and, when the fire was well heated, he threw into it the powders, which shot up in a heap of little sparks, some launching forth their green fire, others volatilising in pale drops like brimstone; and the essences, which, instead of being extinguished in the flame, mounted like serpents of fire through the pipe, with a groaning like distant thunder.

At length when all was consumed,—

'You are right, madame,' said Remy, 'if any one now discovers the secret of this cave, he will think an alchemist has inhabited it; at the present day they burr sorcerers, but they respect alchemists.'

'Eh! besides,' said the lady, 'if they should burn us; it would be but justice, Remy, I think; are we not poisoners, and provided that on the day I mount the pile, I have accomplished my task, I shall not be opposed to this sort of death, more than any other; the majority of the ancient martyrs died in this way.'

Remy made a gesture of assent, and taking the phial from the hands of his mistress, he carefully packed it up. At this moment some one knocked at the door of the street.

'They are our men, madame; you were not mistaken. Quick, ascend and reply, whilst I close the trap.'

The lady obeyed.

A similar thought so lived in these two bodies, that it would have been difficult to say, which of the two held the other in submission.

Remy ascended behind her, and touched the spring. The cave reclosed.



'Remy presented to Diana a mask, which she placed over her face.'



Diana found Grandchamp at the door; awakened by the noise, he had come to open it.

The old man was not a little surprised, when he heard of the approaching departure of his mistress, who informed him of this departure, without saying where she was going. 'Grandchamp, my friend,' she said, 'Remy and myself are going to accomplish a pilgrimage long since arranged: you will speak of this journey to no one, and you will reveal my name to no one, upon any condition.'

'Oh! I swear it, madame,' said the old servitor; 'but shall I not see you again?'

'Undoubtedly, Grandchamp, undoubtedly; do we not always meet again, when not in this world, at least in the other? But, Grandchamp, this house is become useless to us.'

Diana took from a cupboard a bundle of papers.

'Here are the titles that prove the ownership; you will let or sell this house. If in one month from hence, you have found neither a purchaser or a tenant, you will simply abandon it, and return to Meridor.'

'And if I find a purchaser, madame, for how much shall I sell it?'

'For what you like.'

'In that case, I shall take the money to Meridor!'

'You will keep it for yourself, my old Grandchamp.'

'What, madame! such a sum?'

'Undoubtedly. Do I not justly owe you this for your honest services, Grandchamp? and then, besides my debt to you, have I not those of my father to pay?'

'But, madame, without contract, without procuration; I can do nothing.'

'He is right,' said Remy,

'Find a means,' said Diana.

'Nothing more simple. This house was purchased in my name; I sell it again to Grandchamp, who, in this way, may sell it again to whom he likes.'

'Do so.'

Remy took a pen, and wrote his deed of gift at the foot of the contract of sale.

'Now adieu,' said the lady of Montsoreau to Grandchamp, who felt himself greatly affected at remaining alone in the house; 'adieu, Grandchamp, let the horses draw up, whilst I finish my preparations.'

Diana then ascended to her room, cut out with a poniard the canvas of the portrait, rolled it up, enveloped it in some silk, and placed the roll in the travelling-chest.

The frame, left empty and gaping, seemed to recount more eloquently than ever all the griefs it had heard.

The rest of the chamber, when the portrait was gone, had no longer a signification, and became an ordinary room.

When Remy had bound the two chests with cords, he gave a last glance at the street, to assure himself that no one had stopped in it, except the guide; and assisting his pallid mistress to mount the horse :—

‘I think, madame,’ he said to her softly, ‘that this house will be the last in which we shall reside for so long a time.’

‘The last but one, Remy,’ said the lady, in her grave and monotonous voice.

‘Where will the other be, then ?’

‘In the tomb, Remy.’

CHAPTER LXIII

WHAT TOOK PLACE IN FLANDERS. MONSEIGNEUR FRANCIS DE FRANCE, DUKE OF ANJOU AND OF BRABANT, COUNT OF FLANDERS

OUR readers will now permit us to leave the King at the Louvre—Henry of Navarre at Cahors—Chicot on the high road—and the lady of Montsoreau in the street—to join, in Flanders, Monseigneur the Duke of Anjou, very recently named Duke of Brabant, and to whose succour we have seen advance the grand-admiral of France, Anne Daigues, Duke de Joyeuse.

About eighty leagues from Paris, towards the north, the sounds of French tongues, and the colours of France, floated over the French camp on the shores of the river Scheld.

It was night; the fires, disposed in an immense circle, bordered the wide river before Antwerp, and were reflected in the deep waters.

The customary solitude of the polders, with their sombre verdure, was disturbed with the neighing of the French cavalry.

From the heights of the town ramparts, the sentinels saw, reflected from the fires of the bivouacs, the muskets of the French sentinels, a moving and distant flash, which the width of the river, separating this army from the town, rendered as inoffensive as the lightning which dashes from the horizon on a fine summer's evening.

This was the army of the Duke of Anjou.

The purpose for which it was encamped here, we must now recount to our readers.

Some of our readers may already have a knowledge of M. the Duke of Anjou, that prince, jealous, selfish, ambitious, and impatient; who, born so near the throne, which each event seemed to draw nearer to him, could not wait with resignation for death to clear the road for him.

Thus we have seen him at first, coveting the throne of Navarre under Charles the Ninth, then that of Charles the Ninth himself, lastly, that of France, occupied by his brother Henry, ex-king of Poland, which brought him two crowns, to the great jealousy of his brother, who had not been enabled to grasp one of them.

For a moment, at that time, he had turned his eyes towards England, governed by a woman; and that he might possess the throne, he had demanded in marriage the woman, although this woman was named Elizabeth, and was twenty years older than himself.

Upon this point, destiny had began to smile upon him; if, indeed, it would have been one of fortune's smiles to espouse the proud daughter of Henry the Eighth.

He who, all his life, in his hasty desires, had never succeeded even in defending his liberty, who had seen killed, perhaps had had killed his favourites, La Mole and Coconnas, and basely sacrificed Bussy, the bravest of his gentlemen; all, without advancing his elevation, and with great detriment to his glory, this repudiated of fortune found himself at once loaded with the favours of a great queen, until then inaccessible to every mortal regard, and borne by a whole people to the first dignity which this people could confer.

The people of Flanders had offered him a crown, and Elizabeth had given him her ring.

We have not the pretension of being an historian; if we become so occasionally 'tis when by hazard history descends to the level of romance; or, better still, when

romance mounts to a par with history; 'tis then we plunge our inquisitive regards into the princely existence of the Duke of Anjou, which, having constantly walked side by side with royalty, is full of those events, sometimes sombre, at others brilliant, which are seldom remarked but in royal lives.

Let us trace, in a few words then, the history of this existence.

He had seen his brother, Henry the Third, embarrassed in his quarrel with the Guises, and he had allied himself to the Guises; but he soon perceived that the latter had no other object, than to substitute themselves for the Valois, on the throne of France.

He then separated himself from the Guises; but, as we have seen, it was not without some danger that this separation had been effected; and Salcède, broken on the wheel, at the Grève, had proved the importance which the partisans of MM. de Lorraine attached to the friendship of M. d'Anjou.

Besides, for a long while since, Henry the Third had opened his eyes; and a twelvemonth before this history commences, the Duke of Alençon, exiled, or nearly so, had retired to Amboise.

It was then the Flemish had held out their arms to him. Wearied at the domination of Spain, decimated by the pro-consulship of the Duke of Alva, deceived by the treacherous peace of Don John of Austria, who had profited by this peace to retake Namur and Charlemont, the Flemish had appealed to William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, and had made him governor-general of Brabant.

One word on this new personage, who held so lofty a place in history, and who will but reappear with us.

William of Nassau, Prince of Orange, was then fifty, or fifty-one years of age; son of William of Nassau, called the old, and of Julienne de Stolberg, cousin of that Renè of Nassau, slain at the siege of Saint Dizier, having inherited his title of Prince of Orange, he had, whilst still young, been nourished in the most severe principles of the Reformation; he had, we remark, still young, felt his value, and measured the grandeur of his mission.

This mission, which he sincerely believed he had received from heaven; to which he was faithful throughout his life, and for which he died as a martyr, was to found the republic of Holland, which, in fact, he founded.

Young, he had been called by Charles Quint to his court. Charles Quint was an adept in the knowledge of men; he had judged William, and frequently the old emperor, who then held in his hand the mightiest globe ever supported by an imperial arm, consulted the youth on the most delicate matters regarding the policy of the Pays Bas. Moreover, the young man was scarcely twenty-four, when Charles Quint confided to him, in the absence of the famous Philiber Emmanuel of Savoy, the command of the Flemish army. William proved himself worthy of this high trust; he had kept in check the Duke of Nevers and Coligny, two of the greatest captains of the age, and under their eyes, he had fortified Philleppeville and Charlemont; when Charles Quint abdicated, it was on William of Nassau he leant to descend the steps of his throne, and it was to him he gave the charge of carrying to Ferdinand the imperial crown, which Charles Quint had voluntarily resigned.

Then came Philip the Second, and, despite the recommendation of Charles Quint to his son, to look upon William as a brother, the latter soon felt that Philip the Second was one of those princes who was unwilling to recognise a family. Then grew up in his mind that grand idea of enfranchising Holland, and emancipating Flanders, which he would probably have for ever kept to himself, if the old emperor, his friend and father, had not carried out the strange idea of substituting the monk's robe for the royal mantle. The Pays Bas, then demanded the recall of the foreign troops, and then commenced that dreadful struggle of Spain, to retain the prey that resolved to escape from her; then passed over these unfortunate people, always the football of France and the Empire, the vice-royalty of Margaret of Austria, and the sanguinary pro-consulship of the Duke of Alva. Then was roganised that political and religious struggle, of which the protest of the Hôtel de Coulembourg, which demanded the abolition of the inquisition in Flanders, was the pretext. Then advanced that procession of four hundred gentlemen, dressed in the greatest simplicity, defiling in pavio, and carrying to the foot of the throne of the vice-gouvernante, the expression of the general desire, set forth in the protest. Then, and at the sight of these men, so grave, and so simply dressed, escaped from Berlaimont, one of the councillors of the duchess,

that word *beggars*; which, taken up by the Flemish gentlemen, and accepted by them, indicated from thenceforth, in the Pays Bas, the patriot party, which until then, was without an appellation.

It was from this moment, that William commenced playing the rôle, which made him one of the greatest political actors in the world. Constantly beaten in the struggle against the crushing power of Philip the Second, he as constantly raised himself, and always the stronger for his defeats; always raising a fresh army, which replaced the one disappeared, put to flight, or annihilated, he reappeared stronger than before his defeat, and always received as a liberator,

It was in the midst of these alternations of moral triumphs and physical defeats, if we may so express ourselves, that William was apprised, at Mons, of the news of the massacre of Saint Bartholomew.

This was a dreadful blow, and which went to the very heart of the Pays Bas. Holland, and that portion of Flanders which was Calvinist, lost, by this wound, the bravest blood of its natural allies the Huguenots of France.

William replied to this news, at first by a retreat, as was his custom; from Mons, at which he was, he fell back upon the Rhine, and waited for circumstances.

Events rarely fail to a noble cause.

Some news which it was impossible to expect, soon spread abroad.

Some beggars of the sea (there were beggars of the sea as well as beggars on land), driven by a contrary wind into the port of Brille, finding there were no means for them to regain the sea, allowed themselves to go to leeward; and, driven by despair, they took the town, which had already prepared its gibbets to hang them.

The town taken, they drove the Spanish garrisons from the neighbourhood, and not recognising amongst themselves a man of sufficient strength to utilise the success for which they were indebted to chance, they called the Prince of Orange; William ran: it was requisite to strike a grand blow; and by compromising Holland entire, render for ever impossible a reconciliation with Spain.

William published an ordinance which prohibited in Holland the Catholic worship, as the Protestant worship was proscribed in France.

At this manifesto the war recommenced; the Duke of Alva sent against the rebels his own son, Frederic of Toledo, who took from them Zutphen, Nardem, and Haarlem; but this check, far from dispiriting the Hollanders, seemed to have given them new strength; they rose *en masse*; every one took arms, from the Zuyderzee to the Scheld; Spain trembled for a moment, recalled the Duke of Alva, and gave as a successor to him Don Louis de Requesens, one of the conquerors of Lepanto.

A new series of misfortunes now happened to William; Ludovic and Henry of Nassau, who led assistance to the Prince of Orange, were surprised by one of the lieutenants of Don Louis, near Nimegue, defeated and slain; the Spaniards penetrated into Holland, laid siege to Leyden, and sacked Antwerp.

All were in despair, when Heaven came a second time to the succour of the growing republic—Requesens died at Brussels.

It was now that all the provinces, united by one interest, drew up with one accord, and signed, on the 8th November, 1576, that is four days after the sacking of Antwerp, the treaty known under the name of the peace of Ghent, by which they engaged themselves to assist each other in delivering the country from the slavery of the Spaniards and *the other foreigners*.

Don John reappeared, and with him the evil fortune of the Pays Bas. In less than two months, Namur and Charlemont were taken.

Flanders replied to these checks, by naming the Prince of Orange governor-general of Brabant.

Don John now died in his turn. Decidedly the Almighty had pronounced in favour of the liberty of the Pays Bas. Alexander Farnèse succeeded him.

He was an able prince, with charming manners, mild and firm at the same time; a good politician, a skilful general; Flanders trembled, on hearing, for the first time, this honied Italian voice call her *friend*, instead of treating her as a rebel.

William conceived that the Farnèse would do more for Spain with his promises, than the Duke of Alva with his tortures.

On the 29th January, 1579, he made the provinces sign the union of Utrecht, which was the fundamental basis of the public law of Holland.

It was then, that fearing his inability to execute singly this plan of enfranchisement, for which he had struggled for fifteen years, he proposed to the Duke of Anjou, the sovereignty of the Pays Bas, upon condition that he would respect the privileges of the Hollanders and the Flemish, and also their liberty of conscience.

This was inflicting a terrible blow on Philip the Second. He replied to it by offering a recompense of twenty-five thousand crowns for the head of William.

The States, assembled at the Hague, then declared that Philip the Second was deprived of the sovereignty of the Pays Bas, and ordered that thenceforth the oath of fidelity should be made to them, instead of to the King of Spain.

It was at this moment that the Duke of Anjou entered Belgium, and he was received by the Flemish with the distrust with which they received all foreigners. But the support of France, promised by the French prince, was too important to them, not to induce them to give him, at least in appearance, an honest and respectful reception.

The reward, however, of Philip the Second bore its fruit; in the midst of the fêtes upon his reception, a pistol was fired close to the Prince of Orange. William staggered, it was supposed he was mortally wounded; but Holland still needed him.

The ball of the assassin had luckily passed through the two cheeks. He who fired the pistol was Jean Jaureguy, the forerunner of Balthazar Gerard, as Jean Chatel was to be the precursor of Ravallac.

Of all these events there remained to William a gloomy remembrance, which was rarely cheered by a melancholy smile. Flemish and Hollanders respected the pensive William, as they would have respected a god, for they felt that in him alone lay their future; and when they saw him advance, enveloped in his large cloak, his forehead hidden by the shade of his hat, his elbow in the left hand, and his chin in his right hand, men drew aside to give place to him, and mothers, with a sort of religious superstition, showed him to their children, whispering to them :—

‘Look, my son, there’s the Taciturn.’

The Flemish, on the proposition of William, had, then, elected Francis de Valois, Duke of Brabant, Count of Flanders, that is, a sovereign prince.

This, however, did not prevent, quite the contrary,

Elizabeth permitting him to hope for her hand; she saw in this alliance a means of uniting with the Calvinists of England, those of Flanders and of France; the prudent Elizabeth dreamt, perhaps, of a triple crown.

The Prince of Orange favoured in appearance the Duke of Anjou, making of him a provisional mantle of his popularity, content to resume the mantle when he fancied the time arrived to rid himself of the French influence, as he had rid himself of Spanish tyranny.

But this hypocritical ally was more formidable to the Duke of Anjou than an enemy; he paralysed the execution of every plan that would have given him too great a power, or too high an influence in Flanders.

Philip the Second, seeing the entrance of a French prince at Brussels, had summoned the Duke de Guise to come to his assistance, and this help he claimed by virtue of a treaty formerly entered into between Don John of Austria and Henry de Guise.

The two young heroes, who were nearly of the same age, had divined each other, and by meeting, and associating their ambitions, had each engaged to conquer a kingdom for himself.

When, at the death of his redoubted brother, Philip the Second found amongst the papers of the young prince, the treaty signed by Henry de Guise, he appeared to take no umbrage at it. Besides, why trouble himself with the ambition of the dead? did not the tomb enclose the sword which could animate the writing?

But a king with Philip's strength, and who knew the political importance of two lines written by certain hands, could not permit to rest in a collection of manuscripts and autographs, the attraction of the visitors to the Escorial, the signature of Henry de Guise, a signature which began to receive so much credit amongst the traffickers of royalty, whom they called the Orange, the Valois, the Hapsbourg, and the Tudors.

Philip the Second, therefore, engaged the Duke de Guise, to continue with him the treaty made with Don John; a treaty, the tenor of which was, that the Lorraine should support the Spaniard in the possession of Flanders, whilst the Spaniard should assist the Lorraine to bring to a happy conclusion, the hereditary counsel which the Cardinal had in former times engrafted in his house.

This hereditary advice was nothing more than not to

suspend, for a single moment, the eternal labour, which should lead the workmen, some fine day, to the usurpation of the throne of France.

Guise acquiesced; he could do no less. Philip the Second threatened to send a duplicate of the treaty to Henry of France, and it was then that the Spaniard and the Lorraine had let loose against the Duke of Anjou, conqueror and king in Flanders, Salcède the Spaniard, belonging to the house of Lorraine, to assassinate him.

In fact, an assassination would terminate satisfactorily for the Spaniard and the Lorraine.

The Duke of Anjou dead, no further pretender to the throne of Flanders, no more successor to the crown of France.

The Prince of Orange remained; but, as we already know, Philip the Second held in readiness another Salcède, who was called Jean Jaureguy.

Salcède was taken, and quartered at the Place de Grève, without having been lucky enough to put his plan in execution.

Jean Jaureguy grievously wounded the Prince of Orange; but happily he only wounded him.

The Duke of Anjou and the Taciturn then kept their standing; good friends in appearance, more mortal rivals in reality, than were those even who would have assassinated them.

As we have observed, the Duke of Anjou had been received with suspicion. Brussels had opened her gates to him, but Brussels was neither Flanders nor Brabant; he had commenced, therefore, either by persuasion or by force, to advance in the Pays Bas, to take, town by town, piece by piece, his adverse kingdom; and upon the advice of the Prince of Orange, who knew the Flemish susceptibility, to eat leaf by leaf, as said Cæsar Borgia, the savoury artichoke of Flanders.

The Flemish, on their side, did not defend themselves too brutally; they felt that the Duke of Anjou would defend them victoriously against the Spaniards; they slowly accepted their liberator, but at length they did accept him.

Francis grew impatient, and stamped his foot, on finding that he advanced step by step only.

'These people are slow and timid,' said his good friends to Francis, 'wait.'

'These people are treacherous and changeable,' said Taciturn to the prince; 'force.'

It resulted that the duke, whose natural pride further exaggerated the delay of the Flemish into a defeat, prepared to take by force the towns which did not yield themselves as readily as he wished.

It was here that awaited him, each watching the other, his ally, the taciturn Prince of Orange; his enemy, the most sombre Philip the Second.

After some success, the Duke of Anjou had encamped before Antwerp, to force this town which the Duke of Alva, Requesens, Don John, and the Duke of Parma, had by turns bent beneath their yoke, without ever exhausting it, without reducing it to slavery for a moment.

Antwerp had called the Duke of Anjou to its aid against Alexander Farnèse; when the Duke of Anjou wished in his turn to enter Antwerp, Antwerp turned her cannons against him.

This is the position in which Francis de France was placed, at the moment we meet him in this history, the day after that on which Joyeuse and his fleet had joined him.

CHAPTER LXIV

PREPARATIONS FOR BATTLE

THE camp of the new Duke of Brabant was formed on both sides of the river Scheld; the army, well disciplined, was, however, agitated by a spirit of indecision easily understood.

In fact, many Calvinists assisted the Duke of Anjou, not from any sympathy for the said duke, but to be as disagreeable as possible to Spain, and to the Catholics of England and France; they fought therefore rather from pride, than from conviction or devotedness, and they well knew that, the campaign once finished, they should abandon the chief, or impose conditions upon him.

Besides these conditions, the Duke of Anjou allowed it to be generally believed that when the hour arrived, he should anticipate them. His favourite word was, 'Henry

of Navarre has become a Catholic, why should not Francis of France turn Huguenot ?'

On the other side, that is with the enemy, there existed, on the contrary, opposed to the schisms, both moral and political, distinct principles, a cause perfectly determined; the whole quite free from ambition or anger.

Antwerp had at first intended to yield herself but upon conditions, and at her own time; she did not precisely refuse Francis, but she reserved for herself to wait, strong by her situation, and from the courage and warlike experience of her inhabitants; she knew besides that in offering her hand, in addition to the Duke of Guise, on the watch in Lorraine, she would find Alexander Farnèse in the Luxembourg. Why, in case of necessity, should she not accept the assistance of Spain against Anjou, as she had accepted the assistance of Anjou against Spain ?

At liberty after this to repulse Spain, after Spain had helped her to repulse Anjou.

These monotonous republicans had in themselves the strength of iron, in its right sense. On a sudden they saw a fleet approaching the mouth of the Scheld, and they learned that this fleet arrived with the grand-admiral of France, and that this grand-admiral of France brought assistance to their enemy.

Since laying siege to Antwerp, the Duke of Anjou had naturally become the enemy of the Antwerpers.

On perceiving this fleet, and on learning the arrival of Joyeuse, the Calvinists of the Duke of Anjou, made a grimace almost equal to that made by the Flemish. The Calvinists were very brave, but at the same time very jealous; they easily looked over questions of money, but liked not to have their laurels cut, especially with swords that had served to bleed so many Huguenots on Saint Bartholomew's day.

From this resulted quarrels, which commenced on the very night of the arrival of Joyeuse, and continued triumphantly the next day and the day after.

From the tops of their ramparts, the Antwerpers had daily the spectacle of ten or a dozen duels, between Catholics and Huguenots. The polders served them as a camp-list, and they threw into the river more bodies than a quiet affair would have cost the French. If the siege of Antwerp, like that of Troy, had lasted nine years,

the besieged would have had nothing more to do than look at the besiegers; the latter would certainly have destroyed themselves.

In all these quarrels Francis performed the office of mediator, but not without immense difficulty. Engagements took place with the French Huguenots; to wound those was to withdraw from himself the Flemish Huguenots, who could assist him against Antwerp.

On the other hand, to affront the Catholics sent him by the King to die in his service, was, for the Duke of Anjou, a matter not only impolitic, but also compromising.

The arrival of this reinforcement, upon which the Duke of Anjou himself did not reckon, had dismayed the Spaniards, and the Lorraines were ready to burst with fury and vexation.

It was certainly something for the Duke of Anjou to enjoy at the same time this double satisfaction.

But the duke did not thus manage all parties, without the discipline of his army suffering greatly.

Joyeuse, upon whom, we may remember, this mission had never smiled, found himself ill at ease in the midst of this assemblage of men of such different sentiments. He felt instinctively that the moment for success had passed; something like the presentiment of a grand check ran through the air, and in his courtier idleness, as in his pride as captain, he deplored having come so far to share in a defeat.

Thus, he conscientiously believed, and said aloud, that the Duke of Anjou had acted very wrong to lay siege to Antwerp; the Prince of Orange, who had given him this treacherous council, had disappeared since the advice had been followed, and it was not known what had become of him; his army was in garrison in the town, and he had promised the Duke of Anjou the support of this army; but not a word was heard as to any division between the soldiers of William and the Antwerpers, and the news of a single duel between the besieged had not arrived to gladden the besiegers since they had pitched their camp before the town.

That which Joyeuse more especially dwelt upon in his opposition to the siege was, that this important town of Antwerp was almost a capital. Now to possess a great town by the consent of this great town, would be a real advantage; but to take by assault the second capital

of his future states, was to expose himself to the disaffection of the Flemish; and Joyeuse too well knew the Flemish to hope, even supposing that the Duke of Anjou took Antwerp, that they would not avenge themselves sooner or later, for this seizure, and with usury.

This opinion Joyeuse proclaimed aloud in the duke's tent, on the very night in which we have introduced our readers to the French camp.

Whilst the council was being held amongst his officers, the duke was seated, or rather reclining upon a long chair, which, upon occasion, served him as a couch, and he heard not the opinion of the grand-admiral of France, but the whisperings of his lute player Aurilly.

Aurilly, by his gross complaisances, by his base flattery, and his continual assiduity, had riveted the favour of the prince; he had never served him as his other friends had done, by disobliging either the King or the influential personages, so that he had escaped the rock upon which La Mole, Coconnas, Bussy, and so may others, had been shipwrecked.

With his lute, with his love messages, his perfect information concerning every personage, and the intrigues of the court, with his skilful manœuvres, to throw into the nets of the duke the prey he coveted, whatever this prey might be, Aurilly had made, in an underhand way, a large fortune, adroitly disposed in case of reverse; so that he always appeared the poor musician Aurilly, running after a crown, and singing like the cigales when he was hungry.

The influence of this man was immense, because it was secret.

Joyeuse, on seeing him thus interrupting his developments of strategy, and diverting the attention of the duke, retired behind, cutting short the thread of his discourse.

Francis pretended not to hear, but in reality was attentively listening; so that this impatience of Joyeuse did not escape him; and immediately,—

‘Monsieur the Admiral,’ he said, ‘what is the matter?’

‘Nothing, monseigneur; I am only waiting for your highness to have leisure to hear me.’

‘But I am listening, Monsieur de Joyeuse; I am listening,’ hastily replied the duke. ‘Ah! you Parisians then think me so stupefied by this Flemish war, that I

cannot listen to two persons speaking together, when Cæsar dictated seven letters at the same time !'

'Monseigneur,' replied Joyeuse, launching at the poor musician a withering glance, under which the latter bowed with his usual humility, 'I am no singer who needs an accompaniment when I speak.'

'Good, good, duke; Aurilly, silence.'

Aurilly bowed.

'Then,' continued Francis, 'you do not approve my attack upon Antwerp, Monsieur de Joyeuse ?'

'No, monseigneur.'

'I adopted this plan in council, however.'

'And for that reason, monseigneur, 'tis with great reserve I speak, after so many experienced captains.'

And Joyeuse, like a courtier, bowed to those around him.

Several voices were raised to prove to the grand-admiral, that their opinions coincided with his.

Others, without speaking, made signs of approval.

'Count de Saint Aignan,' said the prince to one of his bravest colonels, 'you are not of the opinion of M. de Joyeuse, are you ?'

'Yes, monseigneur,' replied M. de Saint Aignan.

'Oh ! 'tis that, as you made a grimace.'

Each began to laugh, Joyeuse turned pale, the count reddened.

'If M. the Count de Saint Aignan,' said Joyeuse, 'is in the habit of giving his opinion in this fashion, he is a counsellor but little polished, that's all.'

'Monsieur de Joyeuse,' hastily replied Saint Aignan, 'his highness did wrong to reproach me with an infirmity contracted in his service; at the taking of Cateau Cambresis, I received a wound from a pike in my head, and from that time I have had a nervous contraction, which occasions the grimace of which his highness complains. At the same time, it is not an excuse I make you, Monsieur de Joyeuse, 'tis an explanation,' said the count proudly, turning himself round.

'No, monsieur,' said Joyeuse, offering him his hand, ''tis a reproach you make, and you are right.'

The blood mounted to the face of Francis.

'And to whom this reproach ?' he said.

'Why, to me, probably, monseigneur.'

'Why should Saint Aignan make you a reproach; Monsieur de Joyeuse; you whom he scarcely knows ?'

'Because I had believed for a moment, that M. de Saint Aignan had so slight a love for your highness, as to counsel you to besiege Antwerp.'

'But still,' exclaimed the prince, 'my position in the country must be defined. I am Duke of Brabant and Count of Flanders by name. I must also be so in fact. This Taciturn, who hides himself I know not where, has spoken to me of a kingdom. Where is this kingdom? In Antwerp. Where is he? also in Antwerp, probably. Well! we must take Antwerp; and Antwerp taken, we shall know how to act.'

'Eh! monseigneur, you know it already, upon my soul, or you are really not so good a politician as they say. Who has advised you to take Antwerp? M. the Prince of Orange, who has disappeared at the moment of commencing the campaign; M. the Prince of Orange, who, in making your highness Duke of Brabant, has reserved to himself the lieutenancy-general of the duchy; the Prince of Orange, whose interest it is to ruin the Spaniards through you, and you, through the Spaniards; Monsieur the Prince of Orange, who will replace you; who will succeed you, if he has not already replaced and succeeded you. The Prince of Orange! Eh! monseigneur, up to the present time, by following the counsels of the Prince of Orange, you have done nothing but indispose the Flemish. Let there come a reverse, and those who dared not look you in the face, will run after you, like those cowardly dogs who run after such as turn tail.'

'What! you suppose that I can be beat by wool merchants and beer drinkers?'

'These wool merchants and beer drinkers, have cut out plenty of work for King Philip de Valois, the Emperor Charles the Fifth, and King Philip the Second; who were three princes, of sufficiently good houses, monseigneur, for the comparison not to be too disagreeable to you.'

'You fear a check then?'

'Yes, monseigneur, I do fear it.'

'You will not be there, then, Monsieur de Joyeuse?'

'And why shall I not be there?'

'Because I am astonished that you doubt, to such a point, your own bravery, that you already see yourself flying before the Flemish; in any event, be tranquil; these prudent traders are in the habit, when they march to combat, of muffling themselves up in too heavy armour,

that they may have the chance of reaching you, should they run after you.'

'Monseigneur, I do not doubt my courage; monseigneur, I shall be in the first rank; but I shall be beat in the first rank, whilst others will be in the last, that's all.'

'But still, your argument is not logical, Monsieur de Joyeuse; you approve that I take small places.'

'I approve that you take those which are not defended.'

'Well! after having taken the small places which are not defended, as you say, I shall not recoil before the larger one, because it defends itself, or rather because it threatens to defend itself.'

'And your highness is wrong; better retreat upon sure ground, than fall into a ditch by continuing to advance.'

'Be it so; I shall stumble, but I will not retreat.'

'Your royal highness will do here as you please,' said Joyeuse bowing, 'and we, on our part, shall do as your highness directs; we are here to obey you.'

'This is no answer, duke.'

'Tis the only reply, however, that I can give to your highness.'

'Well: prove to me that I am wrong; I ask nothing better than to be of your opinion.'

'Monseigneur, look at the army of the Prince of Orange, it was yours was it not? Well! instead of encamping with us before Antwerp, it is inside Antwerp, which is very different; look at the Taciturn, as you yourself call him; he was your friend and your counsellor; not only are you ignorant of what is become of the counsellor, but you also think yourself sure, that the friend has changed into an enemy. Look at the Flemish; when you were in Flanders, they dressed their vessels and their walls on seeing you arrive; they now shut their gates at sight of you, and point their cannon at your approach, neither more nor less than if you were the Duke of Alva. Well! 'tis I who tell you so: the Flemish and Hollanders, Antwerp and Orange, only wait for an opportunity to unite against you, and that moment will be when you shout "Fire," to your artillery.'

'Well!' replied the Duke of Anjou, 'we will vanquish with the same blow, Antwerp and Orange, Flemish and Hollanders.'

'No, monseigneur, because we have but just enough men to make the assault upon Antwerp, supposing that

we have only to do with the Antwerpens; and whilst we are making the assault upon Antwerp, the Taciturn will fall upon you, without a word, with his eternal eight or ten thousand men, constantly destroyed, and as constantly renewed; by whose aid, for the last ten or twelve years, he has kept in check the Duke of Alva, Don John, Requesens, and the Duke of Parma.'

'And you persist in your opinion then ?'

'In which ?'

'That we shall be beaten ?'

'Infallibly.'

'Well ! 'tis easy to escape, on your part at least; Monsieur de Joyeuse,' continued the prince bitterly; 'my brother has sent you to me with assistance; your responsibility is safe then, if I dismiss you, in saying that I do not think I need being supported.'

'Your highness may dismiss me,' said Joyeuse; 'but on the eve of a battle, it would be a disgrace to me to accept it.'

A long murmur of approbation acknowledged the words of Joyeuse; the prince felt that he had gone too far.

'My dear admiral,' he said, rising and embracing the young man, 'you will not understand me. It seems to me, however, that I am right, or rather, that in my present position I cannot confess aloud that I have been wrong; you reproach me with my faults, I know them; I have been too jealous of the honour of my name; I have too ardently wished to prove the superiority of the French arms; I am, therefore, wrong. But the evil is done; would you commit a worse? We are here before armed men, that is to say, before men who dispute with us what they have offered me. Would you have me yield to them? Why, in that case, to-morrow they would retake piece by piece what I have conquered; the sword is drawn, let us strike, or otherwise we shall be struck; this is my opinion.

'From the moment your highness thus speaks,' said Joyeuse, 'I shall refrain from adding a word; I am here to obey you, monseigneur, and with as good a heart, be assured of it, if you lead me to death, as if you lead me to victory; and yet—but no, monseigneur—'

'What ?'

'No, I wish, but must be silent.'

'No, par Dieu, speak, admiral; speak, I desire.'

'Then in private, monseigneur.'

'In private?'

'Yes, if it please your highness.'

Every one rose and withdrew to the extremity of the spacious tent of Francis.

'Speak,' said the latter.

'Monseigneur might accept indifferently a reverse that Spain may inflict upon him, a check that would render triumphant these wool merchants and beer drinkers of Flanders, where this Prince of Orange has a double face; but will he accommodate himself as willingly to allow M. de Guise to laugh at his expense?'

Francis knit his brow.

'M. de Guise?' he said, 'eh! what has he to do in all this?'

'M. de Guise,' continued Joyeuse, 'has attempted, they say, to have monseigneur assassinated; if Salcède has not avowed it on the scaffold, he has avowed it on the rack. Now 'twill be a great joy to offer the Lorraine, who plays a great part in all this, or I am much mistaken, to find us beaten before Antwerp, and to procure for him (who knows?), without loosening his purse-strings, that death of a son of France, for which he had promised to pay so dear to Salcède. Read the history of Flanders, monseigneur, and you will there see that the Flemish have a habit of manuring their land with the blood of the most illustrious princes, and the best French chevaliers.'

The duke bowed down his head.

'Well! be it so, Joyeuse,' he said; 'if I must, I will give to the cursed Lorraine the joy of seeing me dead; but I will not give him that of seeing me fly. I have a thirst for glory, Joyeuse: for, the only one of my name, I have still my battles to gain.'

'And Cateau Cambresis, that you forget, monseigneur; it is true, you are the only one.'

'Compare then this skirmish with Jarnac and Moncountour, Joyeuse, and draw the account of what I still owe to my much loved brother Henry. No, no,' he added, 'I am no petty king of Navarre; I am a French prince, myself.'

And turning towards the gentlemen, who, at the words of Joyeuse, had withdrawn:—

'Gentlemen,' he added, 'the assault still holds; the

rain has ceased, the ground is in good order, we will attack this night.'

Joyeuse bowed.

'Monseigneur will be good enough to detail the orders,' he said, 'we await them.'

'You have eight vessels, without reckoning the admiral's galley; is it not so, Monsieur de Joyeuse?'

'Yes, monseigneur.'

'You will force the line, and it will be an easy matter, the Antwerpers having in port only merchant vessels; you will then lie broadside towards the quay. There, if the quay is defended, you will storm the town, and attempt a landing with your fifteen hundred men.'

'With the rest of the army I will form two columns, the one commanded by M. the Count de Saint Aignan, the other commanded by myself. Both shall attempt an escalade by surprise, at the moment the first report of the cannon is heard.'

'The cavalry will remain as a reserve, in case of a check, to protect the retreat of the column repulsed.'

'Of these three attacks, one will certainly succeed. The first corps established on the ramparts, will fire a fusée to rally to it the other troops.'

'But we must foresee all, monseigneur,' said Joyeuse. 'Suppose that, which you do not think supposable, namely, that the three attacking columns are all three driven back.'

'In that event we shall gain the vessels under protection of the fire of our batteries, and we will scatter ourselves in the polders, where the Antwerpers will not risk themselves to come and seek us.'

They bowed in sign of adhesion.

'Now, gentlemen,' said the duke, 'silence. Let the troops asleep be awakened, and let them embark orderly; let not a spark, not a musket-shot reveal our design. You will be in the port, admiral, before the Antwerpers suspect your departure. We who are going to cross it, and follow the left bank, shall arrive at the same time as yourself.'

'Go, gentlemen, and good courage. The fortune that has followed us hither, will not fear to cross the Scheld with us.'

The officers quitted the tent of the prince, and gave their orders with the precautions indicated.

Presently, the whole of this human throng made its busy murmur heard; but we might have supposed it nothing but the wind playing amongst the gigantic reeds, and the thick herbage of the polders.

The admiral returned on board his galley.

CHAPTER LXV

MONSEIGNEUR

THE Antwerp men, however, did not observe without uneasiness the hostile preparations of M. the Duke of Anjou, and Joyeuse was not wrong in attributing to them all the ill will possible.

Antwerp was like a bee-hive when the evening comes, calm and deserted outside, within full of murmur and movement.

The Flemish under arms patrolled the streets, barricaded their houses, doubled the chains, and fraternised with the battalions of the Prince of Orange, a portion of whom were already in garrison at Antwerp, and the other portion of which entered by fractions, and when entered, scattered themselves in the streets.

When all was ready for a vigorous defence, the Prince of Orange, in a sombre and moonless evening, in his turn, entered the town without any manifestation, but with the calm and firmness which presided at the accomplishment of all his resolutions, when these resolutions were once determined upon.

He descended at the Hôtel de Ville, where his confidants had prepared everything for his installation.

Here he received all the aldermen and centeniers of the bourgeoisie, passed in review all the officers of the paid troops, and lastly, received the principal officers to whom he communicated his projects.

Amongst these projects, the most settled was that of profiting by the manifestation of the Duke of Anjou against the town, to break with him. The Duke of Anjou had reached the point to which the Taciturn had hoped to draw him, and the latter observed with delight, this new competitor for the sovereign power ruin himself like the others.

On the same evening that the Duke of Anjou was preparing to attack, as we have seen, the Prince of Orange, who had been for two days in the town, held a council with the commandant of the place for the bourgeois.

To every objection made by the governor, to the plans of defence of the Prince of Orange, if this objection might produce any delay in the plans, the Prince of Orange shook his head like a man surprised at this indecision.

But at every shake of the head, the commandant of the place replied :—

‘Prince, you know ’tis a matter agreed upon, that monseigneur should come; let us therefore wait for monseigneur.’

This magical word made Taciturn knit his brow, but whilst frowning and biting his nails, he waited.

Every one now fixed his eyes upon a large clock with heavy hammers, and seemed to ask the pendulum to accelerate the arrival of the personage so impatiently expected.

Nine o’clock at night sounded; uncertainty was become a real anxiety, some videttes pretended to have seen a movement in the French camp.

A small flat boat, like the basin of a pair of scales, had been despatched on the Scheld; the Antwerpens, less uneasy at what was taking place towards the land, than what was passing towards the sea, had wished to obtain precise news as to the French fleet; the little bark had not returned.

The Prince of Orange rose, and biting, from rage, his leather gloves, he said to the Antwerpens :—

‘Monseigneur will keep us waiting so long, gentlemen, that Antwerp will be taken and burnt before he arrives; the town therefore may judge of the difference which exists on this head between the French and the Spaniards.’

These words were not such as to reassure the civil officers, so that they regarded each other with great emotion.

At this moment, a spy whom they had sent on the road to Malines, and who had pushed his horse as far as Saint Nicolas, returned, and announced that he had neither seen nor heard anything that announced the arrival of the person for whom they waited.

‘Gentlemen,’ exclaimed the Taciturn, at this information, ‘you see we shall wait uselessly; let us do the

business ourselves; time presses, and the country is guaranteed in nothing. It is right to place confidence in superior abilities; but you see that above all, 'tis upon ourselves we must rely.

'Let us deliberate, therefore, gentlemen.'

He had scarcely finished, when the screen of the hall rose, and a valet of the town appeared, and pronounced this single word, which at such a moment seemed to be worth a thousand others.

'Monseigneur !'

In the accent of this man, in the joy he could not prevent himself manifesting, in accomplishing his duty as an usher, one might have read the enthusiasm of the people, and all its confidence in him whom they called by this vague and respectful name,—

'Monseigneur !'

Scarcely had the sound of this voice, trembling with emotion, died away, than a man of a tall and majestic height, wearing with supreme grace the cloak which entirely enveloped him, entered the hall, and courteously saluted those whom he found there.

But at the first glance, his proud and penetrating eye distinguished the prince in the midst of the officers. He walked straight to him and offered him his hand.

The prince pressed his hand affectionately, and almost with respect.

They each called the other monseigneur.

After this brief exchange of civilities, the stranger disencumbered himself of his cloak.

He was habited in a leather doublet, wore cloth breeches, and long leather boots.

He was armed with a long sword, which seemed to form a part, not of his costume, but of his limbs, so easy did it play at his side; a small dagger was passed through his belt, close to an aumônerie filled out with papers.

At the moment he threw off his cloak, might be seen his long boots soiled with dust and mud.

His spurs, red with his horse's blood, returned a sinister sound at every step he took across the flag-stones.

He took his place at the council-table.

'Well ! where are we, monseigneur ?' he said.

'Monseigneur,' replied the Taciturn, 'you must have seen, on coming here, that the streets were barricaded.'

'I have seen as much.'

'And the houses turned into battlements,' added an officer.

'As to that I was unable to see it; but 'tis a good precaution.'

'And the chains doubled,' said another.

'Very good,' replied the stranger, in a careless tone.

'Monseigneur does not approve these preparations for defence?' said a voice, in an accent of evident uneasiness and disappointment.

'Yes, yes,' said the stranger, 'but still I do not think that, in our present circumstances, they are very useful; they fatigue the soldier, and alarm the bourgeois. You have a plan of attack and defence, I suppose?'

'We waited for monseigneur, to communicate it to him,' replied the burgomaster.

'Describe it, gentlemen, describe it,'

'Monseigneur has arrived rather late,' added the prince, 'and in the interim, I thought it better to act.'

'And you have done right, monseigneur; besides we know that when you act, you act well. But neither have I, be well assured, lost my time on my road.'

And turning towards the bourgeois:—

'We know by our spies,' said the burgomaster, 'that a movement is preparing in the French camp; they dispose themselves for an attack; but as we know not from which side this attack will take place, we have fixed the cannon in such a manner that it is equally divided along the whole extent of the rampart.'

'Tis prudent,' said the stranger, with a slight smile, and stealing a glance at the Taciturn who remained silent, and, though a soldier, leaving the bourgeois to talk of war.

'It has been the same with our civic troops,' continued the burgomaster, 'they are spread in double posts along the whole length of the walls, and have orders to run instantly to the point attacked.'

The stranger made no reply; he seemed to wait for the Prince of Orange to speak.

'Yet,' continued the burgomaster, 'the opinion of the majority of the members of the council is, that it seems impossible that the French meditate anything more than a feint.'

'And with what object, this feint?' demanded the stranger.

'With the object of intimidating us, and bringing us to an amicable arrangement by delivering the town to the French.'

The unknown again regarded the Prince of Orange; he appeared like a perfect stranger to everything that was taking place, so attentively did he listen to the words with an indifference almost a disdain.

'And yet,' said an uneasy voice, 'it is thought that preparations for an attack, have been remarked in the French camp.'

'Suspicions without certainty,' resumed the burgomaster, 'I have myself examined the camp with an excellent glass from Strasbourg, the cannons appeared nailed to the ground, the men are preparing for sleep without any emotion, M. the Duke of Anjou gave a dinner in his tent.'

The stranger again looked at the Prince of Orange; this time it seemed as if a slight smile rose upon the lips of the Taciturn, whilst, by a movement scarcely visible, his disdainful shoulders accompanied this smile.

'Eh! gentlemen,' said the unknown, 'you are under a complete error, it is not a furtive attack they are now preparing for you, 'tis a right earnest and good assault you will have to support.'

'Really?'

'Your plans, natural as they appear to you, are incomplete.'

'Yet, monseigneur,' said the bourgeois, humbled at their knowledge of strategy being doubted.

'Incomplete,' repeated the unknown, 'in this: that you expect an assault and that you have taken all your precautions for this event.'

'Undoubtedly.'

'Well! this assault, gentlemen, if you believe me——'

'Finish, monseigneur.'

'You will not wait for it, but you will make it.'

'There, there,' exclaimed the Prince of Orange, 'this is speaking.'

'At this moment,' continued the stranger, who now found that he had acquired a supporter in the prince, 'the vessels of M. de Joyeuse are getting ready for action.'

'How do you know this, monseigneur?' exclaimed at once the burgomaster and the other members of the council.

'I know it,' said the stranger.

A murmur of doubt passed like a breath through the assembly; but light as it was, it grazed the ears of the able soldier, who had been introduced on the scene to play there, in all probability, the principal part.

'Do you doubt it?' he asked, with a perfect calm, and like a man accustomed to struggle against every apprehension, every pride, and every bourgeois prejudice.

'We do not doubt it, since you say so, monseigneur. But will your highness permit us to observe——'

'Speak.'

'That if it were thus——'

'Well?'

'We should be informed of it.'

'By whom?'

'By our marine spy.'

At this moment a man pushed by the usher, entered heavily into the hall, and respectfully made a few steps over the polished floor, advancing half towards the burgomaster, half towards the Prince of Orange.

'Ah! ah!' said the burgomaster, "'tis you, my friend.'

'Myself, Monsieur the Burgomaster,' replied the new-comer.

'Monseigneur,' said the burgomaster, "'tis the man we sent as a spy.'

At this word *monseigneur*, which was not addressed to the Prince of Orange, the spy made a movement of surprise and joy, and advanced hastily, the better to see the individual designated by this title.

The new-comer was one of those Flemish sailors, whose type is so recognisable, being so accentuated; the square head, the blue eyes, the short neck and wide shoulders; he squeezed between his two thick hands his woollen and dripping bonnet, and when he was near the officers, a wide track of water was left behind him.

In fact, his heavy garments were literally soaked and dripping with water.

'Oh! oh! here is a brave fellow who has had a swim for it,' said the stranger, regarding the sailor with that habit of authority, which at once imposes on the soldier and the servant, because it implies both command and kindness.

'Yes, monseigneur, yes,' said the sailor eagerly. 'and the Scheld is wide and rapid too, monseigneur.'

'Speak, Goes, speak,' continued the unknown, knowing well the price of the favour he bestowed on a simple sailor in calling him by his name.

So that from this moment, the stranger appeared to exist for Goes alone; and addressing himself to him although sent by another, it was perhaps to this other that he ought to have rendered an account of his mission.

'Monseigneur,' he said, 'I went in my smallest boat; I passed with the consign in the midst of the barrage we have made on the Scheld with our vessels, and I pushed as far as those damned Frenchmen—Ah! pardon, monseigneur!'

Goes stopped.

'Go on, go on,' said the stranger, smiling, 'I am but half a Frenchman, and consequently I am but half damned.'

'Well, then, monseigneur, since monseigneur is kind enough to pardon me——'

The stranger signed with his head.

'Whilst I was rowing at night with my oars padded with linen, I heard a voice that cried :—

"'Boat ahoy. What do you want?'"

'I thought it was to myself the question was addressed, and I was about to reply something or other, when I heard shouted behind me :—

"'Admiral's boat.'"

The stranger regarded the officers with a motion of his head that signified :—

'What did I tell you?'

'At the same moment,' continued Goes, 'and as I wished to row alongside, I felt a terrible shock; my boat was upset; the water covered my head; I rolled into an abyss without a bottom; but the breakers of the Scheld recognised me as an old acquaintance, and I once more saw the sky.

'It was nothing more than the admiral's boat which, in conducting M. de Joyeuse on board, had passed over me. Now, God alone knows how I escaped being drowned or pounded.'

'Thanks, brave Goes, thanks,' said the Prince of Orange, rejoiced at finding his anticipations were realised; 'go, and be silent.'

And extending his hand from his side, he placed a purse in his hand.

The sailor, however, seemed still to wait for something; it was the stranger's permission to retire.

The latter made a benevolent sign with his hand, and Goes retired, evidently more satisfied with this sign, than with the present of the Prince of Orange.

'Well!' said the stranger to the burgomaster, 'what do you say to this report? do you still doubt that the French are preparing, and do you think it was to pass the night on board, that M. de Joyeuse repaired from the camp to the admiral's galley?'

'You guess then, monseigneur,' said the bourgeois.

'No more than Monseigneur the Prince of Orange, who is in all things of my opinion, I am sure. But like his highness, I am quite resigned, and especially I know those who are there on the other side.'

And his hand pointed to the polders.

'So that,' he continued, 'I shall be much astonished if they do not make the attack to-night.'

'Hold yourselves in readiness, therefore, gentlemen, for if you give them the time, they attack in earnest.'

'These gentlemen will do me the justice to admit, that before your arrival, monseigneur, I held just the same language to them, which you now express.'

'But,' demanded the burgomaster, 'in what way does monseigneur think the French will attack?'

'Here are the probabilities; the infantry is Catholic, it will fight by itself, this means that it will attack on one side; the cavalry is Calvinist, it will also fight alone. Two sides. The fleet belongs to M. de Joyeuse, it arrives from Paris; the court knows with what object it sailed, he will have his share of the battle and the glory. Three sides.'

'Then let us form three corps,' said the burgomaster.

'Make one of them, gentlemen, a single one, with all the best soldiers you have, and leave those of whom you have any doubt, to guard your walls outside. Then with this corps, make a vigorous sortie at the moment the French least expect it. They intend to attack, let them be anticipated and attacked themselves; if you wait for the assault, you are lost, for in the assault the French have no equal; as you have no equal, gentlemen, when on plain ground you defend the approach to your towns.'

The faces of the Flemish brightened up.

'What did I say, gentlemen?' asked the Taciturn.

'Tis a great honour for me,' said the stranger, 'to agree, without knowing it, in the opinion of the first captain of the age.'

The two bowed courteously.

'Well, 'tis a settled point,' continued the stranger, 'you make a furious charge upon the infantry and cavalry. I hope your officers will lead this sortie in such a fashion that you will repulse the besiegers.'

'But their vessels, their vessels,' said the burgomaster, 'they will force our toll, and as the wind is at north-west, they will be in the middle of the city in two hours.'

'You have yourselves six old vessels and thirty barks at Sainte Maria, that is at a league from hence, have you not? 'Tis your marine barricade, 'tis your chain closing the Scheld.'

'Yes, monseigneur, just so. How did you know all these details?'

The stranger smiled.

'I know them, as you see,' he said; 'there lies the fate of the battle.'

'Then,' said the burgomaster, 'we must send reinforcement to our brave sailors.'

'On the contrary, you can still dispose of four hundred men who were there; twenty intelligent men, brave and devoted, will be sufficient.'

The Antwerpers opened their large eyes.

'Would you,' said the stranger, 'destroy the French fleet entirely, at the expense of your six old vessels, and your thirty old boats?'

'Heim!' muttered the Antwerpers, looking at each other, 'our vessels are not so old, nor are our boats so very old.'

'Well estimate them,' said the stranger, 'and you shall be paid their value.'

'See,' said the Taciturn quietly to the stranger, 'see the men against whom I have to struggle every day. Oh! if it were only events, I would soon have surmounted them.'

'Come, gentlemen,' continued the stranger, carrying his hand to his aumônerie, which was well filled, as we have observed, 'estimate, but estimate quickly; you shall be paid in bills upon yourselves. I hope you will find them good.'

'Monseigneur,' said the burgomaster, after a moment's

deliberation with the aldermen, centeniers, and dizainiers, 'we are traders, and not seigneurs; you must therefore pardon us for certain hesitations, for our souls you see are not in our bodies but in our counters. Still there are certain circumstances, in which, for the general good, we know how to make sacrifices. Dispose, therefore, of our vessels as you like.'

'My faith, monseigneur,' said the Taciturn, 'tis your doing. It would have taken me six months to obtain what you have brought about in ten minutes.'

'I dispose of your barrage, gentlemen; but this is the way I shall dispose of it:

'The French, led by the admiral's galley, will attempt to force the passage. I double the chains of the barrage, leaving them sufficient width for the fleet to engage itself in the midst of your boats and vessels. Then from your barks and vessels, the twenty brave men I have left there, throw grappling irons, and the grappling irons thrown, they fly in a boat, after having set fire to your vessels charged with combustibles.'

'And you hear,' exclaimed the Taciturn, 'the French fleet will be entirely burnt.'

'Yes, entirely,' said the stranger; 'and then, no retreat by water, no retreat across the polders; for you will open the sluices at Malines, Berchem, Lier, Duffel, and Antwerp. First repulsed by you, pursued by your dykes let loose, surrounded on all sides by this unexpected tide always flowing, by this sea which flows but does not ebb, the French will be all drowned, destroyed, annihilated.'

The officers uttered a cry of joy.

'There is but one inconvenience,' said the prince.

'Which, monseigneur?' demanded the stranger.

'Why, that it will require a whole day to expedite orders to the different towns, and we have but an hour.'

'An hour will be sufficient,' replied the one they called monseigneur.

'But who will apprise the flotilla?'

'It is already apprised.'

'By whom?'

'By me. If these gentlemen had refused to give it me, I would have purchased it of them.'

'But Malines, Lier, Duffel?'

'I passed by Malines and by Lier, and I sent an agent to Duffel. By eleven o'clock the French will be beaten,

by midnight the fleet will be burned, by one o'clock the French will be in full retreat, at two o'clock Malines will open her dykes, Lier will open her sluices, Duffel will launch forth her canals from their beds; the whole plain will then become a furious ocean that will destroy houses, fields, woods, villages, it is true; but which, at the same time, I repeat to you, will destroy the French, and this in such a mode, that not a single one will return to France.'

A silence of admiration, and almost of fear, succeeded these words; and then suddenly the Flemish burst into applause.

The Prince of Orange stepped towards the stranger, and offered him his hand.

'Thus then, monseigneur, all is ready on our side.'

'All,' replied the stranger. 'And, stay, I think on the side of the French, all is ready as well.'

And he pointed with his finger to an officer who raised the tapestried door.

'Monseigneurs and gentlemen,' said the officer, 'we have received information that the French are on the march, and advance towards the town.'

'To arms,' cried the burgomaster.

'To arms,' repeated those present.

'One instant, gentlemen,' interrupted the stranger, in his manly and commanding voice; 'you forget to allow me to give you a last recommendation, more important than all the rest.'

'Speak! speak!' exclaimed every voice.

'The French are about to be surprised, it will not therefore be a combat, not even a retreat, but a flight; to pursue them we must be light. Away with cuirasses, morbleu! 'tis your cuirasses, under which you cannot move, that have cost you the loss of every battle in which you have been defeated. Down with the cuirasses, gentlemen, down with the cuirasses!'

And the stranger showed his wide chest protected simply by a buff coat.

'We shall meet again in the fight, gentlemen,' continued the stranger; 'in the meantime go to the place of the Hôtel de Ville, where you will find all your men in battle array. We shall join you there.'

'Thanks, monseigneur,' said the prince to the stranger, 'you have saved both Belgium and Holland.'

'Prince, you overwhelm me,' said the other.

'Does your highness mean to draw a sword against the French ?' demanded the prince.

'I shall so arrange it, as to fight against the Huguenots,' replied the stranger, bowing with a smile which his sombre companion would have envied him, and which God alone understood.

CHAPTER LXVI

FRENCH AND FLEMISH

At the moment when the whole council left the Hôtel de Ville, and when the officers were placing themselves at the head of their men to execute the orders of the unknown chief, who seemed as if sent to the Flemish by Providence himself, a protracted rumour, which seemed to envelope the whole town, resounded, and concluded by a deafening cry.

At the same time the artillery thundered.

This artillery surprised the French in the midst of their nocturnal march, and when they supposed they should themselves surprise the sleeping town. But instead of delaying their march, it hastened it.

If they could not take the town by surprise, with the help of scaling ladders as they said in these times, they might, as we have seen the King of Navarre do at Cahors, fill the moat with fascines, and blow up the gate with petards.

The cannon of the ramparts continued to fire, therefore; but at night its effect was small. After replying to the cries of their adversaries, by similar ones, the French advanced in silence towards the ramparts, with that daring intrepidity which is usual with them in the attack.

But suddenly, gates and posterns opened, and from all sides rushed armed men; but it is not the ardent impetuosity of the French which animates them, 'tis a sort of heavy drunkenness, which does not restrain the movement of the soldier, but which renders the soldier as massive as a rolling wall.

It was the Flemish who advanced in closed battalions, in compact groups, above whom continued to thunder an artillery more noisy than formidable.

Now commenced the combat foot to foot; the sword and the dagger clash, the pike and the blade cross, the reports of the pistols, the detonation of the arquebuses, shed a light over features reddened with blood.

But not a cry, not a murmur, not a complaint; the Flamand fought with rage, the French with spite. The Flamand is furious at having to fight, for he fights neither by trade nor for pleasure. The Frenchman is furious at having been attacked, when he attacked.

At the moment they came hand to hand, with that fury we should vainly endeavour to describe, some hurried reports were heard towards Sainte Marie, and a light rises above the town like a gathering of flames. 'Tis Joyeuse who attacks, and who is making a diversion, by forcing the barrier which defends the Scheld, to penetrate with his fleet into the heart of the town.

At least this is what the French hope.

But it is not thus.

Driven by a west wind, that is by the most favourable one for such an enterprise, Joyeuse had weighed anchor, and the admiral's galley leading, he had allowed himself to be driven by the wind despite the current. All was ready for the combat, his marines, armed with their sabres for boarding, were aft; his gunners, with lighted matches, were at their pieces; his topmen, with their grenades, were in the tops; lastly, the picked sailors, armed with hatchets, held themselves in readiness to jump on board the vessels and barks of the enemy, and break the chains and cordage to make a passage through the fleet.

They advanced in silence. The seven vessels of Joyeuse, formed like a wedge, of which the admiral's galley formed the sharpest point, looked like a troop of gigantic phantoms gliding over the water. The young man, whose post was on the quarter-deck, could not rest at his post. Dressed in magnificent armour, he had taken in the galley the place of first lieutenant; and bent under the bowsprit, his eye seemed to pierce the sea fogs and the darkness of the night.

Presently, through this double obscurity, he discovered the dyke which stretched sombrely across the river. It seemed abandoned and deserted; but in this country of ambush there was something frightful in this abandonment and this solitude.

They still advanced, however; they were in sight of the flotilla, scarcely at ten cables' lengths, and at every second they approached it nearer, without a single '*Qui vive*' once striking upon the ear of the French.

The sailors only saw, in this silence, a negligence at which they rejoiced; the young admiral, more far-seeing, surmised some ruse, which alarmed him.

At length the prow of the admiral's galley got entangled in the rigging of the two vessels which formed the centre of the barrier, and driving them before her, she bent by the middle the whole of this flexible dyke, whose compartments, held together by chains, and which, yielding without breaking, took, on fixing itself to the sides of the French vessels, the same form that the latter vessels themselves presented.

Suddenly, and at the moment the hatchet-bearers received orders to descend and break the barrier, a shower of grappling irons, thrown by invisible hands, clung to the rigging of the French vessels.

The Flemish anticipated the manœuvre of the French by what they did.

Joyeuse supposed that his enemies were offering him a battle without quarter. He accepted. The grappling irons thrown out on his side, bound, with iron knots, the enemy's vessels to his own. Then seizing a hatchet from the hands of a sailor, he rushed the first upon the vessel he held the tightest, crying: 'Board her! board her!'

His whole crew followed him, officers, and sailors, uttering the same cry as himself; but no cry responded to it, no force opposed itself to his aggression.

But they saw three boats filled with men, gliding noiselessly over the river, like three benighted sea-birds.

These boats fled by means of oars, the birds disappeared swiftly.

The assailants remained motionless on the vessels they had conquered without a struggle.

It was the same throughout the whole line.

Suddenly Joyeuse heard beneath his feet a heavy grumbling noise, and a smell of brimstone spread through the air.

A flash crossed his mind, he ran to the hatchway which he raised; the interior of the vessel was on fire.

At the same moment, the cry, 'To the vessels! to the vessels!' resounded throughout the whole line.

Each remounted more quickly than he had descended; Joyeuse descended the first, remounted the last.

At the moment he reached the side of his galley, the flames burst over the deck of the vessel he had quitted.

Now, like so many volcanoes rose the flames; every boat, every sloop, every ship was a crater; the French fleet being so much heavier vessels, appeared to overtop an abyss of fire.

The order was given to cut the ropes, to break the chains, tear away the grappling irons; the sailors rushed to the rigging, with the rapidity of men convinced that upon this rapidity depends their safety.

But the work was immense; perhaps they might detach the grappling irons thrown by the enemies on the French vessels; but there were, besides, those thrown by the French fleet on the enemies' vessels.

Suddenly twenty detonations were heard; the French ships shook to their very ribs, groaned in their very depths.

It was the cannon that defended the dyke, and which, loaded to the muzzle, and abandoned by the Antwerpens, burst of themselves as the fire reached them, destroying, without warning, all that stood in their way.

The flames mounted like gigantic serpents along the masts, rolled round the yards, and with their sharp tongues licked the iron flanks of the French fleet.

Joyeuse, with his magnificent armour inlaid with gold, giving, in a calm and imperious voice, his orders, in the midst of the flames, resembled one of those fabulous salamanders with a million scales, which, at every move they made, shook off a cloud of sparks.

But soon the detonations redoubled, stronger and louder; it was no longer the cannons that thundered, it was the gunrooms that had taken fire, it was the vessels themselves that blew up.

As long as he had hoped to break the mortal chains that bound him to his enemies, Joyeuse had struggled, but there was no longer a hope of succeeding; the flames had gained the French vessels, and upon each of the enemy's vessels blowing up, a shower of fire, like an artificial flower-work, fell on their decks.

But this fire is wild—implacable, which increases by that which extinguishes the other fires, and which devours its prey to the very edge of the water.

The Dutch vessels, in bursting, had broken the dykes,

but the French vessels, instead of continuing their route, went adrift themselves all in flames, and dragging after them some fragments of a burning ship, clinging to it with its burning arms.

Joyeuse saw there was no longer any possible struggle; he gave orders to lower every boat, and land on the left bank.

The order was transmitted to the other vessels by the speaking trumpets; those who did not hear it had instinctively the same idea.

The whole crew had embarked, to the last sailor, before Joyeuse quitted the deck of his galley.

His coolness seemed to have inspired a *sang-froid* in every one; each of his sailors had his sabre or boarding-hatchet in his hand.

Before he had reached the river's bank, the admiral's galley blew up, lighting on one side the shadow of the town, and on the other the immense horizon of the river which was lost in the sea.

During this time the artillery of the ramparts had slackened its fire; not that the combat had diminished in fury, but, on the contrary, because the Flemish and French, having come hand to hand, they could no longer fire upon one side without endangering the other.

The Calvinist cavalry had charged in its turn, doing prodigies; before the iron of its horsemen it opens, under the feet of its horses it grinds; but the wounded Flamands disembowel the horses with their long knives.

Despite this brilliant charge of the cavalry, a little disorder takes place in the French columns, and they only maintain their position instead of advancing, whilst from the gates of the town constantly issue fresh battalions, who fall upon the army of the Duke of Anjou.

Suddenly a loud rumour is heard almost under the walls of the town. The cries: 'Anjou! Anjou! France! France!' resounded on the flanks of the Antwerpers, and a frightful onset shakes the whole of this serried mass. By the mere impulse of those who drive it, the former are brave because they can do no otherwise.

This movement is caused by Joyeuse; these cries are uttered by the sailors; fifteen hundred men, armed with hatchets and cutlasses, and led by Joyeuse, to whom they have brought a horse without a master, have fallen suddenly on the Flemish; they have to avenge their

fleet in flames, and two hundred of their companions burnt or drowned.

They have not chosen their rank in battle, they have rushed upon the first group which from their language and costume they have recognised as an enemy.

No one handled better than Joyeuse his long fighting sword; his wrists turned like a mill, and every blow cut through a head, every thrust made a hole through his man.

The group of Flemish upon which Joyeuse had fallen, was devoured like a grain of wheat, by a legion of ants.

Intoxicated with this first success, the sailors pushed in advance.

Whilst they gained ground, the Calvinist cavalry, surrounded by this torrent of men, lost a little; but the infantry of the Count de Saint Aignan continued to struggle hand to hand with the Flemish.

The duke had seen the fire of the fleet like a distant light, he had heard the detonation of the cannon, and the explosions of the vessels, without suspecting anything beyond an insensate combat, which on that side must naturally terminate in a victory for Joyeuse; not supposing for a moment that a few Flemish vessels, would struggle against a French fleet.

He expected, therefore, every moment, a diversion on the part of Joyeuse, when he was suddenly told that the French fleet was destroyed, and that Joyeuse and his marines were charging in the midst of the Flemish.

The duke now began to be alarmed: the fleet was the retreat, and consequently the safety of the army.

He sent an order to the Calvinist cavalry to attempt a fresh charge, and horses and horsemen, exhausted, rallied to rush once more on the Antwerpers.

The voice of Joyeuse was heard crying in the midst of the *mêlée*: 'Stand firm, Monseigneur de Saint Aignan; France, France!'

And like a reaper cutting a field of wheat, his sword whirled in the air and fell, felling before him its harvest of men; the weak favourite, the delicate sybarite, seemed to have put on with his cuirass, the fabulous strength of the Nemean Hercules.

And the infantry, which heard his voice above the clamour, who saw his sword flashing in the dark, took courage, and like the cavalry, made a fresh effort and returned to the combat.

But now the man they called Monseigneur, issued from the town on a handsome black horse.

He wore black armour—that is, the helmet, armlets, cuirass, and thigh-pieces of burnished steel; he was followed by five hundred cavaliers well mounted, whom the Prince of Orange had placed under his orders.

On his side, William the Taciturn, by the parallel door, issued with the chosen infantry, which had not yet been engaged.

The cavalier in armour hastened to the most pressed; this was where Joyeuse fought with his sailors.

The Flemish recognised him, and separated before him, crying joyously: 'Monseigneur! monseigneur!' Joyeuse and his sailors felt the enemy bend; they heard the cries, and suddenly found themselves opposed to this fresh troop, who suddenly appeared to them like enchantment.

Joyeuse pushed his horse to the black cavalier, and the two encountered each other with a sombre fury.

At the first crossing of their swords a shower of sparks flew around.

Joyeuse confident in the temper of his armour, and in his skill at fencing, dealt some rough blows, which were skilfully parried. At the same time some blows of his adversary reached him full in the breast, and gliding on the cuirass, despite the armour, drew a few drops of blood from his shoulder.

'Oh!' exclaimed the young admiral, feeling the point of the steel, 'this man is a Frenchman; and what is more, this man has studied arms under the same master as myself.'

At these words, the stranger was seen to turn round, and attempt to throw himself upon some other point.

'If you are a Frenchman,' cried Joyeuse to him; 'you are a traitor, for you fight against your King, against your country, against your colours.'

The stranger only replied by turning to attack Joyeuse furiously.

But this time Joyeuse was forewarned, and knew with what a clever swordsman he had to deal. He parried successively three or four blows, dealt with as much address as rage, as much strength as fury.

It was now the stranger who made a movement of retreat.

'Stay,' cried the young man, 'see what we do when we fight for our country, a pure heart and a loyal arm suffice to defend a head unhelmeted, a brow unvisored.'

And tearing off the clasp of his helmet, he threw it away from him, leaving uncovered his noble and handsome head, whose eyes sparkled with vigour, pride, and youth.

The cavalier in armour, instead of replying with his voice, or following the example given, uttered a dull groan and raised his sword to the naked head.

'Ah!' said Joyeuse, parrying the blow, 'I spoke true, you are a traitor, and like a traitor you shall die.'

And pressing him, dealing him one after another two or three blows with the point, one of which penetrated through the openings of the visor of his helmet.

'Ah! I will slay you,' said the young man, 'and I will tear off your mask which defends and hides you so well, and I will hang you on the first tree I find in my way.'

The unknown was about to reply, when a cavalier who had joined him whispered in his ear and said:—

'Monseigneur, no skirmishing, your presence is required yonder.'

The unknown looked in the direction indicated by the hand of the speaker, and saw the Flemish hesitating before the Calvinist cavalry.

'Indeed,' he said, in a sombre voice, 'those are they I seek.'

At this moment, a troop of cavaliers fell upon the marines of Joyeuse, who, wearied with striking with their giant arms, made their first step backwards.

The cavalier in black profited by this movement to disappear in the *mêlée* and the darkness.

CHAPTER LXVII

CONTINUATION

A QUARTER of an hour afterwards, the French gave way throughout the line, and endeavoured to retreat without flying.

M. de Saint Aignan took every measure to obtain for his men a retreat in good order.

But another troop of five hundred horse, and two thousand infantry, issued quite fresh from the town, and fell upon this harassed army, already in retreat. They were the old bands of the Prince of Orange, who by turns had fought against the Duke of Alva, against Don John, against Requesens, and against Alexander Farnèse.

They must now decide to quit the field of battle, and retreat by land, since the fleet upon which they relied in case of accidents was destroyed.

Despite the coolness of the chiefs, despite the bravery of the greatest number, a frightful rout commenced.

It was at this moment that the unknown, with all the cavalry that had scarcely been engaged, fell upon the flying, and encountered in the rearguard Joyeuse and his marines, two-thirds of whom he had left on the field of battle.

The young admiral was mounted on his third horse, the first two having been killed under him. His sword was broken, and he had taken from the hands of a wounded marine one of the heavy boarding-hatchets, which turned about his head with the same facility as a sling in the hands of a slinger.

From time to time he turned round and faced them like a wild boar, who cannot decide upon flying, and turns desperately on the hunter.

On the other side, the Flemish, who, following the advice of him they called Monseigneur, had fought without cuirasses, were active in the pursuit, and gave not a moment's rest to the Angevine army.

Something like remorse, or at least a doubt, seized upon the heart of the unknown at sight of this complete rout.

'Enough, gentlemen, enough,' he said in French to his men; 'they are driven to-night from Antwerp, and in a week will be driven from Flanders; let us ask no more from the god of war.'

'Ah! 'twas a Frenchman, 'twas a Frenchman,' exclaimed Joyeuse; 'I had guessed rightly, traitor! Ah! may you be cursed, and die the death of a traitor!'

This furious imprecation seemed to discourage the man whom a thousand swords raised against him could not shake; he turned his horse, and, a conqueror, fled almost as rapidly as the conquered.

But this retreat of a single man changed in nothing the face of things; fear is contagious; it had taken possession of the whole army, and under the weight of this insensate panic, the soldiers commenced flying in despair.

The horses became animated, despite fatigue, for they themselves seemed to be also under the influence of fear, the men dispersed to find shelter; in a few hours the army did not exist as an army.

It was now the moment when, in pursuance of the order of Monseigneur, the dykes were to open and the sluices to be raised, From Lier to Termonde, from Haesdonk to Malines, each little river, swollen by its tributaries, each overflowing canal, sent over the level country its contingent of furious water.

Thus, when the fugitive French relaxed in their flight, having left their enemies; when they saw the Antwerpens at length return towards their town, followed by the soldiers of the Prince of Orange; when those who had escaped safe and sound from the carnage of the night, thought themselves at last saved, and breathed for a moment, some with a prayer, others with a blasphemy; it was at this hour, that a fresh enemy, blind and unpitying, was let loose against them with the rapidity of the wind, with the impetuosity of the sea; at the same time, in spite of the imminence of the danger which began to surround them, the fugitives suspected nothing.

Joyeuse had commanded a halt to his marines, reduced to eight hundred men, and the only ones who had preserved anything like order in this frightful defeat.

The Count de Saint Aignan, breathless, speechless, only speaking by threats and gestures, strove to rally his scattered infantry.

The Duke of Anjou, at the head of the fugitives, mounted upon an excellent horse, and accompanied by a domestic holding another by the bridle, pushed in advance, without appearing to care for any one.

'The miserable has no courage,' said some.

'The valiant is magnificent in his *sang-froid*,' said others.

A few hours of repose, enjoyed from two until six o'clock in the morning, gave strength to the infantry to continue their retreat.

But provisions failed.

As to the horses, they appeared still more fatigued than the men, scarcely dragging themselves along, for they had not eaten since the previous evening.

Thus they marched at the tail of the army.

They hoped to reach Brussels, which was with the duke, and in which they had many partisans; they were not however without alarm as to its good intentions; they had for a moment reckoned upon Antwerp, as they believed they could reckon upon Brussels.

There, at Brussels, that is at scarcely eight leagues from their present place, they would revictual the troops, and take up an advantageous encampment, to recommence the campaign thus interrupted, at the moment they might judge the most convenient.

The fragment they brought back would serve as a nucleus for a fresh army.

But at this hour, little did they dream of the horrible moment when the ground would sink from under the feet of the unfortunate soldiers—when the mountains of water would beat and roll over their heads—when the remains of so many brave men, carried away by the slimy waters, would float towards the sea, or be stopped on their route to fatten the soil of Brabant.

M. the Duke of Anjou had breakfast served in the cabin of a peasant between Heboken and Heckhout.

The hut was empty, the inhabitants had fled the previous night; and the fire, lighted by them to cook their supper, still burned in the chimney.

The soldiers and officers resolved to imitate their chief, and spread themselves through the two hamlets we have named; but they saw, with a surprise mixed with fear, that every house was deserted, and that the inhabitants had carried off nearly the whole of the provisions.

The Count de Saint Aignan took his chance with the others; the indifference of the Duke of Anjou, at the very hour when so many brave men were dying for him, disgusted him, and he kept at a distance from the prince.

He was one of those who said :—

‘The miserable has no heart.’

He visited on his own account two or three houses which he found empty; he knocked at the door of a fourth, when he was told that for two leagues round, that is, in the circumference of the country they occupied, every house was alike.

At this news, M. de Saint Aignan knit his brow, and made his usual grimace.

'*En route, gentlemen,*' he said to the officers, '*en route.*'

'But we are harassed, and dying with hunger, general.'

'Yes, but you are alive, and if you remain here another hour you are dead; perhaps even now it is too late.'

M. de Saint Aignan could designate nothing, but he suspected some great danger concealed in this solitude.

They decamped.

The Duke of Anjou took the head, M. de Saint Aignan guarded the centre, and Joyeuse charged himself with the rearguard.

But two or three thousand men wandered in groups, either weakened by their wounds, or harassed with fatigue, and lay down in the grass, or beneath the trees, abandoned, desolate, struck with some sinister presentiment.

With them remained the dismounted cavalry, those whose horses could no longer drag themselves along, or who had wounded themselves in the march.

There scarcely remained around the Duke of Anjou three thousand sound men in fighting condition.

CHAPTER LXVIII

THE TRAVELLERS

WHILST this disaster was accomplishing, the forerunner of a still more formidable one, two travellers, mounted upon excellent horses, left the gate of Brussels, on a fresh night, and pushed on towards Malines.

They rode side by side, their cloaks tucked up; apparently without arms, always excepting a large Flemish knife, the brass handle of which was seen to sparkle in the belt of one of them.

The travellers rode abreast, each pursuing his own thoughts, perhaps the same, without exchanging a single word.

They had the tournure and costume of those foreign Picards, who at that time carried on an assiduous trade between the kingdom of France and Flanders, a sort of travelling clerks, active and simple, who at this period did the work of those of the present age, without

suspecting that they were a part of the speciality of the great commercial propaganda.

Whoever might have seen them so quietly trotting along the road, lighted by the moon, would have taken them for honest men, hastening to find a bed, after a well-spent day.

It only required, however, to listen to a few phrases detached from their conversation by the wind, when there was conversation, to change this erroneous opinion of them, which the first appearance might give.

And firstly, the strangest words exchanged between them were those they uttered first when about half a league from Brussels.

'Madame,' said the stoutest to the slightest of the two companions, 'really you were right in leaving to-night; we gain seven leagues in making this march, and we arrive at Malines at the moment when, according to all probability, the result of the attack on Antwerp will be known; they will be yonder in all the intoxication of success. In two days, by short stages, we shall reach Antwerp, and this just at the probable hour, when the prince will have exhausted his joy, and will condescend to look upon the earth, after being raised to the seventh heaven.'

The companion who was called Madame, and who in no way revolted against this appellation, despite her dress of a man, replied in a calm, serious, and mild voice :

'My friend, believe me, God will weary of protecting this miserable prince, and will strike him cruelly; let us hasten then to put our projects in execution, for I am not one of those who believe in fatality, and I think that men are the free arbiters of their thoughts and actions. If we do not act, but leave God to act, it was not worth while to live so grievously until to-day.'

At this moment a breeze from the north-west passed whistling and freezing.

'You are shivering, madame,' said the oldest of the two travellers; 'take your cloak.'

'No, Remy, thank you; I no longer feel, as you know, either pains in my body, or trouble in my mind.'

Remy lifted his eyes to heaven, and remained plunged in a sombre silence.

At times he reined in his horse, and turned round in his saddle, whilst his companion rode on, as silent as an equestrian statue.

After one of these momentary halts, and when her companion had rejoined her :—

‘You see no person behind us ?’ she said.

‘No, madame, no one.’

‘The cavalier who joined us the night at Valenciennes, and who inquired about us, after having remarked us so long with surprise ?’

‘I see nothing of him.’

‘But I fancy I saw him again before entering Mons.’

‘And I, madame, am quite sure of having seen him before entering Brussels.’

‘At Brussels, you say ?’

‘Yes, but he has stopped in this last town.’

‘Remy,’ said the lady, approaching her companion, as if she feared that on this deserted road she might be heard; ‘Remy, did he not appear to resemble——’

‘Who, madame ?’

‘In shape, at least, for I did not see his face, that unhappy young man ?’

‘Oh ! no, no, madame,’ hastily replied Remy; ‘not the least in the world; and besides, how could he have guessed that we had quitted Paris, and that we are on this road ?’

‘But as he knew where we were, Remy, when we changed our residence at Paris ?’

‘No, no, madame,’ replied Remy, ‘he has not followed us, nor had us followed; and as I told you yonder, I have strong reasons for believing that he took a desperate part, affecting himself alone.’

‘Alas ! Remy, each bears his portion of suffering in this world; may God lighten that of this poor child !’

Remy replied by a sigh to the sigh of his mistress, and they continued their route, without other noise than that of their horses’ steps over the echoing road.

Two hours thus passed.

At the moment our travellers were entering Vilvorde, Remy hastily turned round his head.

He had heard the sound of a horse’s gallop at the turn of the road.

He stopped, listened, but saw nothing.

His eyes vainly endeavoured to penetrate the darkness of the night, but as no sound disturbed its solemn tranquillity, he entered the village with his companion.

‘Madame,’ he said to her, ‘day will soon appear;

if you listen to me, we will stay here; the horses are tired and you need repose.'

'Remy,' said the lady, 'you try in vain to conceal from me your feelings. You are uneasy, Remy——'

'Yes, for your health, madame; believe me, a woman cannot support such fatigues, and I can scarcely myself——'

'Do as you like, Remy,' replied the lady.

'Well! then, let us enter this little street, at the extremity of which I perceive a lantern expiring; 'tis the sign by which the hostelries are recognised; make haste, I pray you.'

'You have heard something then?'

'Yes, like the step of a horse. It is true that I really think I am deceived; but at all events, I will remain behind a moment to assure myself of the truth or falsity of my doubts.'

The lady, without replying, without attempting to turn Remy from his intention, touched the flanks of her horse, which entered the long, straggling street.

Remy allowed her to pass before him, dismounted, and quitted the bridle of his horse, which naturally followed that of his companion.

As for himself, crouching behind a thick post, he waited.

The lady knocked at the threshold of the hostelry, behind the door of which, as is the hospitable custom of Flanders, watched, or rather slept, a servant girl with large shoulders and robust arms.

The girl had already heard the steps of the horse clatter over the paving of the street, and awaking without ill temper, she opened the door and received the fair traveller.

She then opened, to the two horses, a wide arched door through which they rushed on recognising a stable.

'I wait for my companion,' said the lady, 'allow me to sit by the fire till he joins me; I shall not go to bed till he arrives.'

The servant threw some straw to the horses, closed the door of the stable, entered the kitchen, drew a stool to the fire, snuffed with her fingers the massive candle, and again went to sleep.

In the meantime, Remy, who had placed himself in ambush, watched the passing of the horseman whose horse he had heard gallop.

He saw him enter the hamlet, advancing at a walk, and listening attentively; arrived at the street, the cavalier perceived the lantern, and appeared to hesitate whether he should pass beyond, or enter it.

He suddenly stopped a few feet from Remy, who felt upon his shoulder the breathing of his horse.

Remy grasped his knife.

'Tis he indeed,' he murmured, 'he is in this neighbourhood, he who still follows us! What does he want with us?'

The traveller crossed his two arms over his breast, whilst his horse breathed heavily, stretching out his neck.

He uttered not a single word; but from the fire of his eye, directed now in front and then behind, now in the street, it was not difficult to guess that he was questioning himself whether he should turn back, push forward, or enter the hostelry.

'They have continued,' he murmured quietly; 'let us proceed.'

And taking the reins of his horse, he continued his road.

'To-morrow,' said Remy, 'we will change the route.'

And he rejoined his companion, who was impatiently awaiting him.

'Well!' she said softly, 'are we followed?'

'By no one; I was deceived, we are alone upon the road, and you may sleep in security.'

'Oh! I have no sleep in me, Remy; you know it well.'

'At any rate you will sup, madame, for yesterday you took nothing.'

'Willingly, Remy.'

They awakened the poor servant, who rose up for the second time with the same air of good humour as the first, and learning what was required, drew from the buffet a quarter of salt pork, a cold leveret, and some preserves; she then brought a pot of Louvain beer foaming and pearly.

Remy seated himself at table near his mistress.

The latter now half-filled a cup with the beer, and moistened her lips with it, broke off a morsel of bread, and ate a part of it; and then fell back in her chair, pushing away both the beer and the bread.

'How, you eat no more, my gentleman?' asked the servant.

'No, I have finished, thank you.'

The servant girl then took to regarding Remy, who picked up the bread broken off by his mistress, ate it slowly, and drank a glass of beer.

'And the meat,' she said, 'don't you eat any meat, sir ?'

'No, my child, thank you.'

'You do not find it good, then ?'

'I am sure it is excellent, but I am not hungry.'

The servant joined her hands to express the astonishment in which this strange sobriety plunged her; it was not thus that her travelling countrymen were in the custom of using her.

Remy, concluding that there was some little vexation, in the invoking gesture of the servant, threw a piece of silver on the table.

'Oh !' said the girl, 'for what you have had, mon Dieu ! you may well keep your piece, six deniers for the expense of both.'

'Keep the piece entire, my good girl,' said the lady, 'my brother and myself are sober, it's true, but we would not diminish your profit.'

The girl turned red with joy, and at the same time tears of compassion filled her eyes, so sorrowfully had these words been pronounced.

'Tell me, my child,' said Remy, 'is there any cross road from hence to Malines ?'

'Yes, sir, but a very bad one, whilst on the contrary, monsieur perhaps does not know this, but there is an excellent high road.'

'Yes, my child, I know that. But I must travel by the other !'

'I mentioned it, monsieur, because your companion being a female, the road will be doubly hazardous, for her especially.'

'How so, my girl ?'

'Because to-night a great number of countrymen traverse the country to arrive at Brussels.'

'To Brussels ?'

'Yes; they are emigrating every moment.'

'Why are they emigrating, then ?'

'I do not know, it is the order.'

'The order of whom ? the Prince of Orange ?'

'No; of Monseigneur.'

'Who is this Monseigneur ?'

'Oh! you ask me too much, monsieur; I do not know; but at all events, since last night they have been emigrating.'

'And who are the emigrants?'

'The inhabitants of the country, of the villages, the hamlets, which have neither dykes nor ramparts.'

'Tis strange,' said Remy.

'Why, we ourselves,' said the girl, 'shall depart at day-break, as well as all the people of the hamlet. Yesterday, at eleven o'clock, all the cattle were driven away to Brussels by the canals and cross roads; and this is the reason why the road of which I spoke is now encumbered with horses, carts, and men.'

'Why not on the high road. It seems to me the high road would procure you a safer retreat.'

'I do not know; 'tis the order.'

Remy and his companion regarded each other.

'But we, who are going to Malines, may proceed, may we not?'

'I believe so, unless you prefer doing like the rest; that is, take your way towards Brussels.'

Remy again looked at his companion.

'No, no; we will depart immediately for Malines,' exclaimed the lady, rising; 'open the stable, if you please, my girl.'

Remy rose with his companion, murmuring:—

'Danger for danger, I prefer that which I know; besides, the young man is in advance of us; and if by chance he is waiting for us—why! we shall see!'

And as the horses had not even been unsaddled, he held the stirrup for his companion, mounted himself, and the early morn found them on the banks of the Dyle.

CHAPTER LXIX

EXPLANATION

THE danger incurred by Remy was a substantial danger, for the traveller of the night, after having passed the hamlet and ridden a quarter of a league in advance, and seeing no one on the road, plainly discovered that those he was following, had stopped at the village.

He would not turn back, probably to show in his pursuit the least affectation possible; but he lay down in a field of trefoil, taking the precaution to make his horse descend into one of the deep rhines, which in Flanders serve as enclosures to the meadows.

It resulted from this manœuvre that he found himself in a position to see all, without being seen.

This young man, we have already recognised, as Remy had himself recognised, and as the lady had suspected, was Henri du Bouchage, whom a strange fatality once more threw in the presence of the woman he had sworn to fly from.

After his conversation with Remy on the steps of the mysterious house; that is, after the destruction of all his hopes, Henri had returned to the Hôtel de Joyeuse, fully decided, as he had said, to quit a life which presented itself so miserably to him in its commencement; and like a man of courage, like a good son, for he had the name of his father to maintain pure, he determined upon the glorious suicide of the field of battle.

Now in Flanders they were fighting; the Duke de Joyeuse, his brother, commanded an army, and could choose for him an opportunity of honourably quitting life. Henri did not hesitate; he left his hotel at the termination of the following day, that is, twenty hours after the departure of Remy and his companion.

Letters, arrived from Flanders, announced a decisive *coup de main* against Antwerp. Henri hoped to arrive in time. He took a pleasure in the thought, that, at least, he should die sword in hand, in the arms of his brother, and under the French standard; that his death would make a great noise, and that this noise would pierce the darkness in which the lady of the mysterious house lived.

Noble folly! glorious and sombre dreams! Henri lived four whole days on his grief, and especially on that hope which it would soon end.

At the moment when, wholly absorbed in these dreams of death, he perceived the pointed spire of the steeple of Valenciennes, and when eight o'clock sounded in the town, he remarked that they were about to close the gates; he spurred his horse, and on passing the drawbridge, nearly upset a man who was tightening the girths of his horse.

Henri was not one of those insolent nobles who trample

underfoot all that boast not an escutcheon; on passing he made his excuses to the man, who turned round at the sound of his voice, and immediately drew aside.

Henri, carried away by the fire of his horse, which he vainly endeavoured to stop—Henri shuddered, as if he had seen what he had not expected to see.

‘Ah! I am mad,’ he thought; ‘Remy at Valenciennes; Remy, whom I left four days ago in the Rue de Bussy; Remy, without his mistress, for he had as a companion, a young man, I think! In truth, grief disturbs my brain—disorders my sight to such a point that all that surrounds is invested with the form of my immutable ideas.’

And continuing his road, he entered the town, without the suspicion that had flashed across his mind taking root there for a single moment.

At the first stable he met with on his road, he stopped, threw the bridle to the groom, and seated himself before the door, on a bench, whilst they prepared his chamber and supper.

But whilst he was thus seated, pensive, on the bench, he saw advancing the two travellers, who walked side by side, and he remarked that the one he had taken for Remy, frequently turned aside his head.

The other had his face concealed under the shade of a wide-brimmed hat.

Remy, on passing in front of the hostelry, saw Henri on the bench, and again turned aside his head; but this precaution contributed to make him recognised.

‘Oh! this time,’ murmured Henri, ‘I am not deceived, my blood is cool, my eye clear, my thoughts fresh; recovered from a first hallucination, I am completely master of myself. Now the same phenomenon is reproduced, and I think I can recognise again, in one of these travellers, Remy, that is, the servitor of the house in the faubourg.’

‘No,’ he continued, ‘I cannot rest in such incertitude, and without delay I must clear up my doubts.’

With this resolution, Henri rose and walked in the street on the track of the two travellers; but whether these had already entered some house, or had taken some other route, Henri perceived nothing of them.

He ran to the gates; they were closed.

The travellers therefore had not left the town.

Henri entered every hostelry, questioned, searched; and finished by learning that two travellers had been seen directing their steps towards an auberge of mean appearance, situated Rue de Beffroi.

The host was engaged in closing, when du Bouchage entered.

Whilst this man, allured by the good looks of the young traveller, offered him his house and his services, Henri eagerly examined the interior of the entrance-chamber; and from the place he was in, could again see, on the top of the landing, Remy himself, who was ascending, lighted by the servant with a lamp.

He could not see his companion, who, no doubt, having passed first, had already disappeared.

At the top of the staircase, Remy stopped. On positively recognising him this time, the count had uttered an exclamation; and at the sound of the count's voice, Remy had turned round.

Thus, from his face, so remarkable from the cicatrice which furrowed it, from his regard full of uneasiness, Henri had no longer any doubt, and too much excited to decide upon any plan at the moment, went away asking himself, with a horrible oppression at the heart, why Remy had quitted his mistress, and why he was alone on the same road as himself.

We say alone, because Henri had not at first paid any attention to the second cavalier.

His ideas wandered from one abyss to another.

The following morning, at the opening of the gates, when he supposed he should be enabled to get face to face with the two travellers, he was much surprised to learn, that during the night the two strangers had obtained from the governor the permission to leave, and contrary to custom, the gates had been opened for them.

By this mode, and as they had departed about one o'clock, they had six hours' advance of Henri.

He must recover these six hours. Henri put his horse to a gallop, and at Mons rejoined the travellers whom he passed.

He again saw Remy, but this time Remy must have been a sorcerer to recognise him. Henri had wrapped himself up in a soldier's great-coat, and had purchased another horse.

Still, the penetrating eye of the worthy servitor almost baffled this combination; and at all hazard, the companion of Remy, apprised by a single word, had time to turn away her face, and Henri was again disappointed in seeing it.

But the young man lost not courage; he asked some questions in the first hostelry that gave the travellers an asylum, and as he accompanied these questions with an irresistible auxiliary, he finished by learning that the companion of Remy was a very handsome young man, but very sad, sombre, resigned, and never speaking of fatigue.

Henri shuddered : a light illumined his ideas.

'Might she not be a woman ?' he asked.

'It's possible,' replied the host; 'to-day many women pass thus disguised to join their lovers in the Flemish army, and as 'tis the duty of us aubergistes to see nothing—why we see nothing.'

This explanation broke Henri's heart. Was it not probable, after all, that Remy accompanied his mistress disguised as a cavalier ?

And if this were the case, Henri feared nothing but misfortune from this adventure.

No doubt, as the host had observed, the unknown lady was on her way to rejoin her husband in Flanders.

Remy then lied when he spoke of those eternal regrets; the fable of a former love, which had for ever placed his mistress in mourning, must have been invented by himself, to keep at a distance an importunate surveillant.

'Well ! in that case,' said Henri to himself, more broken in this hope than he had ever been in his despair, 'well ! so much the better; the time will come when I shall have it in my power to accost this woman, and to reproach her with all the subterfuges which have lowered her, her whom I had placed so high in my thoughts and in my heart, to the level of ordinary vulgarities; then, then, I, who have dreamt of her as of a creature almost divine—then, on seeing closer this brilliant envelope of a soul so ordinary—perhaps I may precipitate myself from the summit of my illusions, the height of my love.'

And the young man tore his hair and struck his breast, at the idea that he might one day, perhaps, lose these illusions and this love which was killing him, so true is it that the heart is better dead—than empty.

He was in this position, having passed them as we have observed, and dreaming of the cause which could have driven into Flanders, at the same time as himself, these two personages indispensable to his existence, when he saw them enter Brussels.

We are aware how he continued to follow them.

At Brussels, Henri had obtained precise information as to the campaign projected by M. the Duke of Anjou.

The Flemish were too hostile to the Duke of Anjou, to receive a Frenchman with any distinction—they were too proud of the success that the national cause had obtained, for it was already a success to see the gates of Antwerp closed against the prince called by Flanders to reign over it—they were too proud, we say, of this success, to abstain from humiliating a little this gentleman, who came from France, and who questioned them with the purest Parisian accent, an accent which, at all periods, has appeared so ridiculous to the people of Belgium.

Henri now conceived serious fears as to this expedition, in which his brother took so conspicuous a part; he therefore resolved to hasten his march towards Antwerp.

It was for him an unspeakable surprise to see Remy and his companion, whatever interest they might have in preserving their incognito, obstinately following the same route as himself.

It was a proof that both tended to the same end.

At the extremity of the village, Henri, concealed amidst the trefoil in which we left him, was certain this time, at least, of seeing the face of the young man who accompanied Remy.

Here he would recognise all these doubts, and put an end to them.

And it was now, as we have said, that he beat his breast, so much did he fear losing this chimera which devoured him, but which made him live a thousand lives, whilst waiting for it to kill him.

When the two travellers passed before the young man, whom they were far from suspecting lay concealed there, the lady was occupied in arranging her hair, which she had not been enabled to accomplish at the hostelry.

Henri saw her, recognised her, and nearly fell fainting into the ditch, in which his horse was quietly reposing.

The travellers passed.

Oh ! then rage seized upon Henri, so good, so patient, as long as he fancied he saw in the inhabitants of the mysterious house the loyalty he practised himself.

But after the protestations of Remy, after the hypocritical consolations of the lady, this journey, or rather this disappearance, constituted a species of treason towards the man who had so obstinately, but at the same time so respectfully, besieged the door.

When the blow which had fallen upon Henri was a little softened, the young man shook his handsome fair hair, wiped his forehead covered with sweat, and remounted his horse, fully decided upon taking no further precautions than a remnant of respect advised him to take, and set about following the travellers, openly and undisguised.

No cloak, no hood, no further hesitation in his journey; the road was open to him as to others; he tranquilly seated himself, regulating the pace of his horse to that of the two horses that preceded him.

He had determined to speak neither to Remy nor to his companion, but to make himself merely recognised by them.

'Oh ! yes, yes,' he said; 'if they still possess an atom of heart, my presence, although introduced by chance, will be no less a severe reproach to people without faith, who break my heart at pleasure.'

He had not taken five hundred steps in the track of the travellers, when Remy perceived him.

On seeing him thus deliberately, thus recognisable, advancing, with open brow and undisguised features, Remy became uneasy.

The lady observed it, and turned round.

'Ah !' she said, 'is it not that young man, Remy ?'

Remy again attempted to assure her.

'I do not think so, madame,' he said; 'as far as I can judge by the dress, 'tis a young Walloon soldier, no doubt repairing to Amsterdam, and in his way passing by the theatre of war to seek some adventure.'

'Never mind, I am uneasy, Remy.'

'Reassure yourself, madame, if this young man were the Count du Bouchage, he would already have accosted us; you know whether he was persevering.'

'I know also that he was respectful, Remy, for without this same respect, I should have been contented to say

to you, "Remove him, Remy," and should have troubled myself no more about him.'

'Well! madame, if he was so respectful, he will have preserved this respect, and you will have nothing to fear from him, supposing it to be him, on the road from Brussels to Antwerp, than at Paris in the Rue de Bussy.'

'No matter,' continued the lady, again looking behind her, 'here we are at Malines; let us change horses, if necessary, to advance quicker, but let us hasten to reach Antwerp, let us hasten.'

'Why, on the contrary, madame, I would say to you, let us not enter Malines, our horses are well bred, let us push as far as the village I see yonder on the left, and which is named, I think, Villebrock; by this mode we shall avoid the town, the auberge, the questions, the curious, and we shall be less embarrassed in changing horses or garments, if by chance necessity should compel us to change.'

'Well! then, straight for the village, Remy.'

They turned to the left, entered a path scarcely opened, but which, however, evidently led to Villebrock.

Henri quitted the road at the same place as themselves, took the same path, and followed them, still keeping at a distance.

The uneasiness of Remy showed itself in his side looks, in his agitated manner, in that movement especially which had become a habit with him, of looking behind him with a sort of threat and suddenly spurring his horse.

These different symptoms, as we may well imagine, did not escape his companion.

They arrived at Villebrock.

Out of two hundred houses of which this village was composed, not one was inhabited; some neglected dogs, some lost cats, ran wild in this solitude, the former calling their masters with prolonged howling, the latter flying nimbly, and stopping when in fancied security, to show their nervous muzzles, across a doorway, or at the air-hole of a cellar.

Remy knocked at twenty places, saw nothing, and was heard by nobody.

Henri, on the other hand, who seemed like a shadow attached to the steps of the two travellers, had stopped

at the first house in the village, had knocked at the door of this house, but as ineffectually as those who had preceded him; and guessing that the war was the cause of this desertion, he waited, to continue his route, for the travellers to decide on their movements.

This they did after their horses had breakfasted on some grain found by Remy in the coffer of an abandoned hostelry.

'Madame,' said Remy, 'we are no longer in a peaceful country, nor in an ordinary situation; it will not suit us to be exposed like children. We shall certainly fall upon a band of Frenchmen or Flemish, without reckoning the Spanish partisans, for in the strange situation of Flanders, wanderers of all sorts, adventurers of all countries, must multiply in it; if you were a man, I should hold a different language to you; but you are a woman, you are young, you are handsome, you therefore run a double danger for your life and your honour.'

'Oh! my life, my life, 'tis nothing,' said the lady.

'Tis everything, on the contrary, madame,' replied Remy, 'when life has an object.'

'Well! what do you propose then? Think and act for me, Remy; you know that my thoughts are not on this earth.'

'In that case, madame, let us remain here; if you trust in me, I see many houses which might offer us a safe retreat. I have arms; we will defend ourselves, or conceal ourselves, according as we may be strong enough or too weak.'

'No, Remy, no, I must go forward; nothing shall arrest me,' replied the lady, shaking her head; 'I should have no fears but for you, if I had fears.'

'Then let us ride,' said Remy.

And he pushed on without adding a word.

The unknown lady followed him; and Henri du Bouchage, who had stopped at the same time as themselves, continued his route with them.

CHAPTER LXX

THE WATER

As the travellers by degrees advanced, the country assumed a strange aspect; it appeared as deserted as the towns and villages.

In no part were the cattle grazing in the meadows; in no part the goat hanging on the flanks of the mountain, or along the hedges, rising on their slim legs to reach the green buds of the brambles and wild vine; in no part the shepherd and his flock; in no part the plough and its labourer; in no part the travelling merchant passing from one country to another, his bale on his back; no wagoner singing the coarse song of the northern man, while walking by his heavy cart.

As far as the eye could reach in these magnificent plains, on the little hill-sides, in the extensive fields, along the edges of the woods, not a human figure, not a sound.

It seemed as if nature were on the eve of the day on which men and animals were created.

The evening arrived, Henri, seized with surprise, and agreeing in sentiment with the travellers who preceded him, demanded from the air, from the trees, from the distant horizon, from the very clouds, the explanation of this sinister phenomenon.

The only individuals that gave life to this mournful solitude, shadowed against the purple tints of the setting sun, were Remy and his companion, endeavouring to catch any sound that might reach them; and at a hundred paces behind them, the figure of Henri, preserving without cessation the same distance and the same attitude.

The night felt sombre and cold, the north-west wind whistled through the air, and filled these solitudes with its sound, more threatening than the silence.

Remy stopped his companion, placing his hand on the reins of her horse.

'Madame,' he said to her, 'you know whether I am accessible to fear, you know whether I would make one step backwards to save my life; well, to-night something strange takes hold of me, an unknown torpor chains my faculties, paralyses me, and forbids me to go farther,

madame; call this terror timidity, panic even : madame, I confess, for the first time in my life, I am afraid.

The lady turned round; perhaps all these menacing presentiments had escaped her, perhaps she had seen nothing.

'He is still there,' she said.

'Oh ! 'tis not to him I refer,' replied Remy; 'think no more of him, I pray you; he is alone, and I am equal to a single man. No, the danger I fear, or rather that I feel, that I surmise, with a sentiment of instinct, rather than by the aid of my reason; this danger that approaches, that threatens us, that surrounds us, perhaps; this danger is of another kind; it is unknown, and this is why I call it a danger.'

The lady shook her head.

'Stay, madame,' said Remy, 'do you see yonder the willows that bend their black tops ?'

'Yes.'

'By the side of those trees I perceive a little house; for pity's sake, let us go there; if it is inhabited, the more reason that we should demand hospitality; if it is not so, let us take possession of it, madame; make no objection to it, I entreat you.'

Remy's emotion, his trembling voice, the touching persuasion of his discourse, decided his companion to yield.

She pulled the bridle of her horse in the direction indicated by Remy.

A few minutes afterwards the travellers knocked at the door of this house, built, in fact, on a foundation of willows.

A rivulet, an affluent of the Nethe, a small river that ran about a quarter of a league distant, enclosed between two arms of reeds and two banks of turf, bathed the foot of the willows with its murmuring stream; behind the house, built with bricks and covered with tiles, was a small garden enclosed with a quickset hedge.

All this was empty, solitary, and desolate.

No one replied to the repeated knocking of the travellers.

Remy did not hesitate; he drew his knife, cut a branch of the willows, introduced it between the door and the lock, and bore on the bolt.

The door opened.

Remy entered hastily; for the last hour he had given to all his actions the activity of a man excited by fever. The lock, the coarse production of the industry of a neighbouring smith, had yielded almost without resistance.

Remy hastily pushed his companion into the house, closed the door behind him, drew a massive bolt, and thus entrenched, breathed as if he had recovered his life.

Not content with having thus sheltered his mistress, he installed her in the only chamber of the first floor, where, by feeling about, he encountered a bed, a chair, and a table.

Tranquillised now a little on her account, he re-descended to the ground floor, and by a half-opened blind, he placed himself at the barred window to watch the movements of the count, who, on seeing them enter the house, had approached it at once.

The reflections of Henri were gloomy and in harmony with those of Remy.

'Surely,' he said to himself, 'some danger unknown to us, but known to the inhabitants, hovers over the country; the war ravages the plains, the French have carried Antwerp or will carry it; seized with terror, the peasants have sought a refuge in the towns.'

This explanation was specious, but it did not, however, satisfy the young man.

Besides it brought him to another order of ideas.

'What brings Remy and his mistress in this neighbourhood?' he asked himself. 'What imperious necessity pushes them towards this terrible danger? oh! I will know it, for the moment is at length arrived to speak to this woman, and to put an end for ever to all my doubts. Nowhere has so good an opportunity presented itself.'

And he advanced towards the house.

But on a sudden he stopped.

'No, no,' he said, with one of those sudden hesitations so common in amorous hearts, 'I will be a martyr to the end. Besides, is she not mistress of her actions, and does she know what fable has been forged upon her by this miserable Remy? Oh! 'tis with him, with him alone; I must account, with him who assured me she loved no one! But let me be just still; ought this man, who does not know me, to betray to me the secrets of his mistress? No, no! my misery is certain, and what is worse in my misery is, that I have brought it on myself and will not

visit its weight on any one. What it requires is the revelation of the whole truth, to see this woman arrive at the camp, hanging on the arm or neck of some gentleman, and to say to her : "See what I have suffered, and learn how I have loved you !"

'Well ! I will follow her there; I will behold what I tremble to see, and will die from it; it will save some trouble to the musket and the cannon.

'Alas, you know, my God,' added Henri, with one of those ecstasies he found at times in the depth of his soul, full of religion and love, 'I sought not this supreme anguish, I went smiling to a death decided, calm, and glorious; I wished to fall on the field of battle with a name on my lips, yours, my God ! with a name in my heart, yours; you have not willed it, you destine me for a desperate death, full of bitterness and torture, I am resigned, I accept.'

Then recalling the days of hope and nights of anguish he had passed in front of that inexorable house, he found that after all, apart the doubt that gnawed his heart, his position was less cruel than at Paris, for he saw her at times, he heard the sound of her voice, which he had then never heard, and travelling in her suite, some of those lively aromas that emanate from the women we love, came, mingled with the breeze, to caress his face.

Thus he continued, his eyes fixed on the house that enclosed her,—

'But whilst awaiting this death, and whilst she reposes in this little cabin, I will take these trees for a shelter, and pity myself, I who can hear her voice if she speaks, I who can observe her shadow behind the window ! oh ! no, no, I do not complain; my God ! my God ! I am too happy.'

And Henri reclined under the willows whose branches covered the house, listening with feelings of melancholy it is impossible to describe, to the murmur of the stream that ran by his side.

Suddenly he felt himself shudder, the noise of cannon resounded from towards the north, and passed on, carried away by the wind.

'Oh !' he said to himself, 'I shall arrive too late; they attack Antwerp.'

The first movement of Henri was to rise, remount his horse, and hasten, guided by the noise, to where they

fought : but to do this, he must quit the unknown lady, and die in doubt.

If he had not encountered her on his road, Henri would have followed his route, without a glance behind, without a sigh for the past, without a regret for the future; but on meeting with her, doubts had entered his mind, and with these doubts, irresolution.

He remained.

For two hours he lay down, listening to the successive detonations that reached him, asking himself what could be these reports, so irregular and so loud, which, from time to time, had interrupted the others ?

He was far from suspecting that these reports were caused by the vessels of his brother as they blew up.

At length, towards two o'clock, all was calm; about half-past two all was silent.

The sound of the cannon had not reached, as it appeared, the interior of the house, where if it had reached, the temporary inhabitants had remained insensible to it.

'At this hour,' said Henri to himself, 'Antwerp is taken, and my brother is a conqueror; but after Antwerp will come Gand; after Gand, Bruges; and I shall not lose the opportunity of dying gloriously.

'But before dying, I should like to know what this woman seeks in the French camp.'

And as, after all these commotions that had shaken the air, nature had sank into repose, Joyeuse, wrapped in his cloak, resumed his immobility.

He had fallen into that state of drowsiness which, towards the night, the power of man cannot resist, when his horse grazing at a few paces from him, pricked up his ears and neighed painfully.

Henri opened his eyes.

The animal, firm on his four legs, his head turned in a different direction to that of his body, was inhaling the breeze, which, having changed at the approach of day, now came from the south-east.

'What is it, my good horse ?' said the young man, rising and patting the neck of the animal with his hand; 'some otter has passed and frightened you, or you regret the shelter of a warm stable.'

The animal, as if he had understood the interpellation, and wished to reply to it, made a hasty movement in the

direction of Lier, and with fixed eye and open nostril, listened.

'Oh ! oh !' murmured Henri, "'tis more serious, I think; some troop of wolves following the army to feast on the bodies.'

The horse neighed, bent his head, and by a movement as rapid as lightning he commenced flying towards the west.

But in flying he passed within reach of his master's hand, who seized him by the bridle as he passed, and stopped him.

Henri, without using the reins, held him by the mane and vaulted into the saddle; once there, as he was a good horseman, he became master of the animal and restrained him.

But in less than a minute, that which the horse had heard, Joyeuse began to hear himself, and the terror felt by the lower animal, took possession of the astonished man.

A long murmur, similar to that of a strident and melancholy wind, rose from different points of a half circle, which appeared to extend from the south to the north, puffs of fresh wind, as if charged with particles of water, rarified at intervals this murmur, which then became like the noise of the tide flowing over a pebbly beach.

'What is this ?' demanded Henri, 'is it the wind ? No, since 'tis the wind that brings me this noise, and the two sounds appear to me distinct.

'An army on the march, perhaps; but no;' he placed his ear to the ground; 'I should hear the fall of their steps, the rustling of arms, the murmur of voices.

'Is it the crackling of a fire, again no; for I perceive no light in the horizon, and the sky even appears to be overcast.'

The noise redoubled and became distinct; it was rolling, incessant, ample, and hollow, similar to thousands of cannon drawn at a distance over a sonorous pavement.

Henri fancied for a moment he had discovered the cause of this noise, by attributing it to the cannon we have mentioned, but immediately,—

'Impossible,' he said, 'there is no paved road in this neighbourhood, there are not a thousand cannon in the army.'

The noise still approached.

Henri put his horse to a gallop and gained an eminence.

'What is it I see?' he exclaimed, on reaching the summit.

What the young man saw, the horse had seen before him, for he could not make him advance in that direction, but by tearing his flanks with the spurs, and when he had reached the summit of the hillock, he reared so that his rider nearly lost his seat.

What the horse and rider saw, in the horizon, was a band, pale, immense, infinite, nearly level, advancing over the plain, forming an immense circle, and rushing towards the sea.

And this band enlarged by degrees, in Henri's sight, like a band of cloth being unrolled,

The young man still regarded, undecided, this strange phenomenon, when, on fixing his eyes on the place he had quitted, he remarked that the meadow was impregnated with water, that the little river overflowed, and commenced covering with its vast sheet, raised without visible cause, the reeds, which a quarter of an hour ago rose up from the two banks.

The water gently reached the side of the house.

'Miserable madman that I am,' exclaimed Henri, 'I did not think of it, 'tis the water! 'tis the water! The Flamands have opened their dykes.'

Henri immediately rushed towards the house, and knocked furiously at the door.

'Open, open,' he exclaimed.

No one replied.

'Open, Remy,' cried the young man, furious in his terror, 'tis I, Henri du Bouchage, open.'

'Oh! you have no need to name yourself, Monsieur le Comte,' replied Remy, from the interior of the house, 'and I have recognised you for a long while, but I warn you of one thing, that if you break open the door, you will find me behind it, a pistol in each hand.'

'But you are not aware, then, miserable,' cried Henri, in an accent of despair, 'the water! the water! the water!'

'No fables, no pretexts, no dishonourable ruses, Monsieur le Comte; I tell you that you do not enter this door without passing over my body.'

'Then I will pass over it!' exclaimed Henri, 'for I will

enter. In Heaven's name ! in God's name ! in the name of your own safety and that of your mistress, will you open ?'

'No.'

The young man looked round him, and perceived one of those Homeric stones, rolled by Ajax Telamon on his enemies; he lifted the stone in his arms, raised it above his head, and advancing towards the house in a run, he launched it against the door.

The door flew into pieces.

At the same time a ball whistled past the ear of Henri, but without touching him.

Henri rushed upon Remy.

Remy drew a second pistol, but the priming alone took fire.

'Why, you see plainly that I have no arms,' exclaimed Henri; 'do not defend yourself then against a man who does not attack, but simply regard, regard.'

And he dragged him to the window, which he broke with his fist.

'Well !' he said, 'do you see, now, do you see ?'

And he pointed with his finger to the immense sheet of water that whitened the horizon, and which groaned in its advance, like the front of a gigantic army.

'The water,' murmured Remy.

'Yes, the water ! the water !' exclaimed Henri; 'it invades; look at your feet; the river overflows, it mounts; in five minutes, in five minutes we shall be unable to leave this.'

'Madame !' cried Remy, 'madame !'

'No cry, no terror, Remy; prepare the horses; and quick, quick.'

'He loves her,' thought Remy, 'he will save her.'

Remy ran to the stable, Henri rushed to the staircase.

At the cry of Remy, the lady had opened her door.

The young man lifted her in his arms, as he would have lifted an infant.

But she, fancying treason or violence, struggled with all her force and clung to the partitions.

'Tell her then,' cried Henri, 'tell her that I save her.'

Remy heard the appeal of the young man, at the moment he returned with the two horses.

'Yes, yes,' he cried, 'yes, madame, he saves you, or rather he will save you ! come ! come !'

CHAPTER LXXI

THE FLIGHT

HENRI, without losing time in calming the lady, carried her out of the house, and attempted to place her with himself on his horse.

But she, with a movement of invincible repugnance, slid from this living ring, and was received by Remy, who seated her on the horse prepared for her.

'Oh! what are you about, madame,' said Henri, 'and how do you understand my love? I do it not, believe me, for the pleasure of pressing you in my arms, or folding you against my manly breast; although for this favour, I am ready to sacrifice my life; but we must fly more rapidly than the birds. And stay, stay, do you see them, the birds that are flying?'

In fact, in the scarcely opening twilight might be seen flights of curlews and pigeons, traversing the space on a speedy and frightened wing; and in the night, the usual domain of the silent bat, these noisy flocks, favoured by the sombre puffs of wind, had something sinister to the ear, dazzling to the eye.

The lady made no reply; but as she was in the saddle, she pushed forward her horse without turning her head.

But her horse, and that of Remy, compelled to travel for the last two days, were fatigued.

At every moment Henri turned round, and finding they could not follow him:—

'See, madame,' he said, 'how my horse keeps ahead of yours, and yet I am holding him with both hands; for pity's sake, madame, whilst it is yet time, I no longer seek to take you in my arms, but accept my horse and leave me yours.'

'Thanks, sir,' replied the lady, in her still calm voice, and without the slightest alteration betraying itself in her accent.

'But, madame,' exclaimed Henri, looking behind him with looks of despair, 'the water is gaining upon us, do you hear! do you hear?'

Indeed a horrible cracking noise was at this moment heard; it was the dyke of a village which the inundation had invaded; beams, supports, and terrace had given

way : a double rank of piles were broken with the noise of thunder, and the water, groaning over all the ruins, commenced invading a wood of oak trees, the tops of which shook, and the branches cracked, as if a legion of devils were passing under the foliage.

The uprooted trees were hurled against the piles, the wood from the falling houses floating on the surface of the water; the neighing and distant cries of men and horses, overtaken by the inundation, formed a concert of sounds so strange and so lugubrious that the shudder which agitated Henri, passed to the immovable, untamable heart of the unknown.

She whipped her horse, and her horse, as if he himself understood the imminent danger, redoubled his efforts to avoid it.

But the water was increasing, still increasing; and before ten minutes, it was evident, it would reach the travellers.

Every moment Henri stopped to wait for his companions, and then cried to them :—

‘Quicker, madame; for Heaven’s sake, quicker ! the water is advancing; the water is *racing* ; it is here.’

It did indeed arrive, foaming, whirling, and enraged; it carried away, like a feather, the house in which Remy had sheltered his mistress; it lifted, like a straw, the boat attached to the bank of the rivulet; and majestic, vast, and rolling its waves like the folds of the advancing serpent, it arrived, like a wall, close behind the horses of Remy and the stranger.

Henri uttered a cry of terror, and turned towards the water, as if resolved to fight against it.

‘Why, you can plainly see that you are lost !’ he hurled in despair. ‘Come, madame, there is still time perhaps; dismount, come with me, come.’

‘No, sir,’ she said.

‘But in a minute it will be too late; look, look !’

The lady turned her head, the water was scarcely at fifty paces distance.

‘Let my destiny be accomplished,’ she said; ‘you, sir, fly ! fly !’

Remy’s horse, exhausted, fell and could not rise, despite the efforts of his rider.

‘Save her ! save her ! were it in spite of herself,’ exclaimed Remy.

And at the same time, as he disengaged the stirrups, the water rolled, like a gigantic tomb, over the head of the faithful servitor.

His mistress, on seeing this, uttered a terrible cry, and jumped from her horse, resolved to die with Remy.

But Henri, seeing her intention, had dismounted at the same moment as herself; he seized her round the waist with his arm, and remounting his horse, he started like an arrow.

'Remy! Remy!' cried the lady, her arms stretched towards him, 'Remy!'

A cry answered her; Remy had risen to the surface of the water, and with that indomitable though senseless hope that accompanies the dying, even to the last agony, he swam, supported by a plank.

By his side swam his horse, beating the water with his fore legs, whilst the flood gained upon the horse of his mistress; and in advance of the flood, at the most but twenty paces, Henri and his companion ran not, but fled, on the third horse, mad with fright.

Remy no longer regretted life, since he hoped, in dying, that she whom he loved alone, would be saved.

'Adieu, madame, adieu,' he cried, 'I go the first, and I will say to him who awaits us, that you live for——'

Remy did not finish; a mountain of water passed over his head, and rushed almost under the feet of Henri's horse.

'Remy, Remy,' cried the lady; 'Remy, I will die with you. Monsieur, I will wait for him. I will dismount; in the name of the living God, I wish to.'

She pronounced these words with such energy and savage authority, that the young man relaxed his hold and allowed her to slip to the ground, saying:—

'Well, madame, we will all three die here; thanks to you for this happiness, which I could have never hoped for.'

And as he spoke these words, restraining his horse, the bounding water reached him, as it had reached Remy; but by a last effort of love, he retained by the arm the young woman who had dismounted.

The flood still swept on, the furious surge rolled over them for some seconds pell-mell with the floating wrecks.

It was a sublime spectacle, was the *sang-froid* of this man; so young and so devoted, whose bust was above the water, whilst he supported his companion with one hand; and with his knees, guiding the last efforts of the expiring horse, endeavoured to be useful in the supreme efforts of his agony.

For a moment there was a terrible struggle, during which the lady, sustained by Henri's right hand, contrived to keep her head above the water, whilst with his left hand, he pushed aside the floating timber and the bodies, whose shock would have drowned or crushed his horse.

One of these floating bodies, on passing near them, cried :—

'Adieu, madame, adieu !'

'By Heaven !' exclaimed the young man, 'tis Remy ! well ! you also I will save !'

And without calculating the danger of the additional weight, he grasped the sleeve of Remy, drew him to his left side, and allowed him to breathe freely.

But at the same moment, the horse, exhausted with the triple burthen, was buried up to his neck, then up to his eyes, and at length, his strength failing, he disappeared altogether.

'We must die !' murmured Henri, 'My God ! take my life, it was pure; you, madame,' he added, 'receive my soul, it was yours !'

At this moment Henri found Remy was escaping from him; he made no struggle to retain him; all resistance was now useless.

His only care was to support the lady above the water, that she, at least, might die the last, and that he might say to himself, at his last moment, that he had done all in his power for her against death.

Suddenly, and when he thought of nothing but dying himself, a cry of joy resounded at his side.

He turned round and saw Remy who had reached a boat.

This was the boat of the little house we have seen carried away by the water; the water had drawn it, and Remy who had regained his strength, thanks to the help afforded him by Henri, seeing it pass within his reach, had detached himself from the group, breathless, and in two strokes had reached it.

Its two oars were fastened inside, a small hook was at the bottom.

He held out the hook to Henri, who seized it, drew after him the lady, whom he lifted from beneath her shoulders and whom Remy laid hold of with his hands.

He himself clutching the ledge of the boat, entered with them.

The first streaks of day were appearing, discovering the inundated plains, and the boat balancing like an atom on this ocean covered with wrecks.

About two hundred paces towards the left, rose a little hill, which, entirely surrounded with water, appeared like an island in the middle of the sea.

Henri seized the oars, and rowed towards the hillock, aided by the current.

Remy took the hook, and standing up in front, occupied himself in keeping off the beams and planks, against which the boat might come in contact.

Thanks to the strength of Henri, thanks to the skill of Remy, they attained or rather were thrown against the hillock.

Remy jumped ashore, and seized the chain of the boat, which he drew towards him.

Henri advanced to take the lady in his arms; but she held out her hand and rising by herself, also jumped on shore.

Henri heaved a sigh; for a moment he had the idea of throwing himself back into the abyss and dying in her sight; but an irresistible feeling chained him to life, as long as he saw this woman, whose presence he had so long desired without obtaining it.

He drew the boat on land, and seated himself a few paces distant from the lady and Remy, livid, and dripping with the water that escaped from his clothes, more grievous than blood.

They were saved from the most pressing danger, that is, the water; the inundation, strong as it was, never reached the summit of the little hill.

Beneath them, they could now contemplate this grand fury of the flood, which has no anger above it but that of God.

Henri observed the passing of this rapid, groaning tide, which carried along with it, masses of French bodies, their horses, and their arms.

Remy felt a great pain in his shoulders; a floating plank had struck him at the moment his horse had fallen under him.

As to his companion, putting aside the cold she felt, she had no wound; Henri had secured her against everything it was in his power to avoid.

Henri was much surprised to see that these two beings so miraculously preserved from death, thanked none but him; but for God, the principal author of their safety, had not a single prayer by way of thanks.

The young woman was the first to rise; she remarked that at the extremity of the horizon, towards the west, something like fire could be seen through the mist.

It is unnecessary to observe that this fire was burning on an elevation which the inundation had been unable to reach.

As far as could be judged in the midst of this cold twilight which had succeeded to the night, the fires were distant about a league.

Remy advanced to the point of the hill nearest the fire, and returned to say, he thought, that about a thousand yards beyond the place at which they had landed, commenced a sort of jetty which advanced in a straight line towards the fires.

What made Remy think it was a jetty, or at the least a road, was a double line of trees, straight and regular.

Henri, in his turn, took his observations, which were found to agree with those of Remy; but in this circumstance much was left to chance.

The water, drawn by the declivity of the plain, had thrown them to the left of their route, by making them follow a considerable angle; this drifting, added to the furious course of the horses, took away all means of going eastward.

It is true that the day appeared, but cloudy and misty; in clear weather, and a cloudless sky, might be seen the steeple of Malines, from which they could not be farther than about two leagues.

'Well! Monsieur le Comte,' said Remy, 'what think you of those fires?'

'Those fires which seem to announce to you an hospitable shelter, appear to me threatening, and I mistrust them.'

'Why so?'

'Remy,' said Henri, lowering his voice, 'look at all these bodies: they are all French, not one is Flemish; it announces to us a grander disaster; the dykes have been opened to complete the destruction of the French army, if it has been vanquished; to destroy the effect of the victory, if it has triumphed; why should not these fires be as well lighted by enemies as by friends, or why may they not be simply a ruse, in order to attract the fugitives?'

'However,' said Remy, 'we cannot remain here; cold and hunger will kill my mistress.'

'You are right, Remy,' said the count; 'remain here with madame; I will gain the jetty, and bring back the news to you.'

'No, monsieur,' said the lady, 'you shall not expose yourself alone; we are saved together, we will die together. Remy, your arm, I am ready.'

Every word of this strange creature, had an irresistible tone of authority, to which none had an idea of resisting for a single moment.

Henri bowed, and walked first.

The inundation was more calm, the jetty which almost touched the hill formed a sort of bay in which the water slept. All three entered the boat, and it was again launched amidst the wrecks and floating bodies.

In a quarter of an hour they reached the jetty.

They secured the chain of the boat to the foot of a tree, again set their foot on land, followed the jetty for nearly an hour, and arrived at a group of Flemish huts, in the midst of which, on a place planted with lime-trees, were assembled round a large fire, two or three hundred soldiers, over whose heads waved the folds of a French banner.

On a sudden the sentinel, placed about a hundred paces from the bivouac, blew the match of his musket, crying,—

'Who goes there?'

'France,' replied du Bouchage.

And returning towards Diana:—

'Now, madame,' he said, 'you are saved, I recognise the standard of the gendarmes of Annis, a noble corps in which I have friends.'

At the cry of the sentinel, and the reply of the count, some gendarmes ran to meet the new-comers, doubly well received, in the midst of this terrible disaster, first because they survived the disaster, next because they were compatriots.

Henri was recognised personally on naming his brother. He was warmly questioned, and recounted in what a miraculous manner he and his companions had escaped death, but without saying more.

Remy and his mistress, seated themselves silently in a corner; Henri went to seek them to invite them to approach the fire.

They were both still dripping with water.

'Madame,' he said, 'you will be respected here as in your own house; I have permitted myself to say that you were one of my relations; pardon me.'

And without waiting to receive the thanks of those whose lives he had saved, Henri turned away to join the officers who awaited him.

Remy and Diana exchanged a glance, which, had it been seen by the count, would have been the return so well merited for his courage and delicacy.

The gendarmes of Annis, of whom our fugitives demanded hospitality, had retired in good order after the defeat. Whenever there is a homogenousness of position, identity of sentiment, and a habit of living together, it is not rare to see a spontaneousness in execution, after unity in thoughts.

Thus had it happened that night to the gendarmes of Annis.

Seeing their chiefs abandoning them, and the other regiments seeking different ways for their safety, they looked at one another, closed their ranks, instead of breaking them, put their horses to a gallop, and conducted by one of their ensigns, whom they much loved for his bravery, and whom they respected in an equal degree on account of his birth, they took the route for Brussels.

Like every actor in this terrible scene, they saw the whole progress of the inundation, and were pursued by the raging waters; but luck had determined that they should encounter, on their road, the village of which we have spoken, a position strong both against man and against the elements.

The inhabitants, knowing they were in safety, had not quitted their houses, except the women, the aged, and the children, whom they had sent to the town; so that the Annis gendarmes, on arriving, found some resistance; but death was howling behind them; they attacked like men in despair, triumphed over every obstacle, lost six

men in the attack of the bank, but made good their lodging, and drove away the Flemish.

An hour afterwards, the village was entirely surrounded by water, except on the side of the road by which we have seen Henri and his companion reach them.

Such was the recital made to du Bouchage by the gendarmes of Annis.

'And the rest of the army?' demanded Henri.

'Look,' replied the ensign, 'every instant there passes a body that replies to your question.'

'But—my brother,' hazarded du Bouchage, in a choking voice.

'Alas! Monsieur le Comte, we cannot give you any certain information; he fought like a lion; three times we dragged him from the fire. It is certain he survived the battle, but—for the inundation we cannot say.'

Henri bent down his head, and was buried in some bitter reflections; but suddenly,—

'And the duke?' he said.

The ensign leaned towards Henri, and in a low tone,—

'Count,' he said, 'the duke saved himself amongst the first. He was mounted on a white horse, without any stain except a black star on his forehead. Well! just now, we saw the horse pass amidst a mass of fragments; the leg of a cavalier was entangled in the stirrup and projected above the saddle.'

'Great God!' exclaimed Henri.

'Great God!' murmured Remy, who at the words—'and the duke!' having risen, had heard the recital, and which his eyes soon told to his pale companion.

'And afterwards?' demanded the count.

'Yes, afterwards?' stammered Remy.

'Well! in the eddy caused by the water at the angle of this dyke, one of my men ventured to seize the floating reins of the horse; he reached him, and raised the dead horse. We then discovered the white boot and golden spur which the duke wore, But at the same moment the water rose against him, as if indignant at seeing its prey wrested from it. My gendarme let go, that he might not be dragged underneath, and all disappeared. We shall not even have the consolation of giving a Christian burial to our prince.'

'Dead! he too dead, the heir to the crown; what disasters!'

Remy turned towards his companion, and with an expression impossible to describe,—

'He is dead, madame,' he said; 'you hear?'

'Thanks be to God, who spares me a crime,' she replied, lifting her hands and eyes to Heaven, by way of gratitude.

'Yes, but He takes from us our vengeance,' replied Remy.

'God has always the right to remember it. Vengeance belongs not to man, but when the Almighty forgets it.'

The count saw with a sort of terror this exaltation of the two strange personages whom he had saved from death; he observed them at a distance, and endeavoured in vain, that he might obtain some idea of their desires or their fears, to criticise their gestures and the expression of their physiognomies.

The voice of the ensign drew him from his contemplation,—

'But yourself, count,' said the latter, 'what do you mean to do?'

The count shuddered.

'I?' he said.

'Yes, you.'

'I shall wait here for the body of my brother to pass before me,' replied the young man, with an accent of sombre despair; 'and then I also will attempt to bring it ashore to give him a Christian burial; and believe me, if once I lay hold of him, I will not abandon him.'

These sinister words were heard by Remy, and he addressed to the young man a regard full of affectionate reproaches.

As to the lady, since the ensign had announced the death of the Duke of Anjou she heard nothing more—she prayed.

CHAPTER LXXII

TRANSFIGURATION

AFTER she had offered up her prayer, the companion of Remy rose up so radiant and so beautiful, that the count uttered a cry of admiration and surprise.

She seemed to awaken from a long sleep, whose dreams

had fatigued her brain, and disordered the serenity of her features; a leaden sleep that stamps on the humid forehead of the sleeper the chimerical tortures of his dream.

Or she might be the daughter of Zaire, awakened in the midst of death on her tomb, and rising from her funeral couch, already purified and ready for heaven.

The young woman, recovered from this lethargy, threw around her a look, so mild, so soft, and full of such an angelic beauty, that Henri, credulous like all lovers, fancied he could see her yielding at length to a sentiment if not of friendship, at least of gratitude and pity.

Whilst the gendarmes, after their frugal repast, slept here and there on the different wrecks, whilst Remy himself gave way to sleep, and allowed his weary head to rest on a cross bar to which the bench was fixed, Henri placed himself near the young woman, and in a voice so low and soft that it seemed like the murmur of a breeze,—

‘Madame,’ he said, ‘you live! Ah! allow me to tell you all the joy that overflows my heart, when I see you here, in safety, after seeing you yonder on the brink of the tomb.’

‘Tis true, sir,’ replied the lady, ‘I live by you; and,’ she added with a melancholy smile, ‘I would I were enabled to say to you how grateful I am.’

‘At length, madame,’ said Henri, with a sublime effort of love and self-denial, ‘when I have only saved you, to restore you to those you love.’

‘What do you say?’ demanded the lady.

‘To those you are about to rejoin, through so many perils,’ said Henri.

‘Sir, those whom I love, are dead; those whom I am about to rejoin are dead also.’

‘Oh! madame,’ murmured the young man, falling on his knees, ‘look upon me, upon me who have suffered so much, upon me who have so loved you! Oh! turn not your eyes away; you are young, you are handsome as an angel of heaven. Read deeply in my heart which I open to you, and you will see that this heart contains not an atom of love as other men understand it. You do not believe me! examine the hours that are passed, weigh them, one by one, which has given me joy? which hope? and yet I have persisted. You have made me weep, I have drunk my tears; you have made me suffer, I have consumed my griefs; you drove me to death, I walked

to it without complaining. Even at this moment, in which you turn away your head, in which every word I speak, burning as it is, seems a drop of frozen water falling on your heart, my soul is full of you, and I only live because you live. Did I not lately face death with you? What have I demanded? nothing. Your hand—have I touched it? never, unless to drag you from a fatal danger. I held you in my arms to save you from the waves, did you feel the pressure of my bosom? no. I am nothing but a soul, and my whole being has been purified in the consuming fire of my love.'

'Oh, sir! for pity's sake, do not speak to me thus.'

'For pity's sake, also, do not condemn me. They tell me you love no one; oh! repeat to me that assurance; 'tis a singular favour, is it not, for a man who loves, to wish to hear that he is not loved? but I prefer this, since you tell me at the same time that you are insensible alike to all. Oh! madame! madame! you who are the only adoration of my soul, reply to me.'

Despite the entreaties of Henri, a sigh was the only reply of the young woman.

'You say nothing to me,' continued the count; 'Remy, at least, has had more pity on me than you; he has tried to console me! oh! I see it, you do not reply to me, because you will not say to me that you are going to Flanders to join some one more happy than myself; than I, who am young, however; than I, who carry in my life a portion of the hopes of my brother; than I, who die at your feet, without your saying to me: "I have loved, but I love no longer"; or else, "I love, but I shall cease to love!"'

'Monsieur the Count,' replied the young woman with a majestic solemnity, 'speak not of things which are spoken to a woman, I am the creature of another world, and do not live in this one. If I had found you less noble, less good, less generous, if I had not for you, at the bottom of my heart, the sweet and tender smile of a sister for her brother, I would say to you: "Rise, Monsieur the Count, and no longer importune ears that hold in horror every word of love"; but I will not say this to you, Monsieur the Count, for I grieve to see you suffer. I say more; now that I know you, I will take your hand, I will place it next my heart, and I will readily say to you:—"See, my heart does not beat, live near me if you

will, and assist day by day, if such is your joy, at the grievous execution of a body killed by the tortures of the soul"; but this sacrifice, that you will accept as a happiness, I am sure of it——'

'Oh! yes,' exclaimed Henri.

'Well! this sacrifice I must refuse. From to-day, something has changed in my life; I have no longer the right to lean upon any arm in this world, not even on the arm of that generous friend, of that noble creature, who reposes yonder, and who for an instant is happy in his forgetfulness! Alas, poor Remy,' she continued, giving to her voice the first inflection of sensibility that Henri had remarked in her, 'poor Remy, your waking will also be a mournful one; you follow not the progress of my thoughts, you read not in my eyes, you know not that on issuing from your sleep you will find yourself alone on the earth, for alone I must ascend to God.'

'What do you say?' exclaimed Henri, 'do you also think of dying?'

Remy, awakened by the painful cry of the young count, raised his head and listened.

'You have seen me pray, have you not?' continued the young woman.

Henri sighed in the affirmative.

'That prayer was my adieu to earth; the joy that you remarked on my features, the joy that beams in me at this moment, is the same that you would observe in me, if the angel of death came to me and said: "Rise, Diana! and follow me to the feet of God!"'

'Diana! Diana!' murmured Henri, 'I know then how you are called—Diana! the cherished name, the name adored!'

And the unhappy youth lay at the feet of the young woman, repeating the name with the intoxication of an inexpressible happiness.

'Oh! silence,' said the young woman, in her solemn voice, 'forget the name that escaped me; none, amongst the living, have the right to pierce my heart in pronouncing it.'

'Oh! madame, madame,' exclaimed Henri, 'now that I know your name, tell me not that you will die.'

'I do not say so, sir,' replied the young woman, in her serious voice; 'I say that I am going to quit this world of tears, of hatreds, and of sombre passions, of vile interests,

and of desires without a name. I say that I have no longer anything to do amongst creatures whom God has created my fellows; I have no longer tears in my eyes, the blood no longer makes my heart beat, my head no longer imagines a single thought, since the thoughts that once filled it are now dead; I am now but an unpriced victim, since I sacrifice nothing, neither hopes nor desires, in renouncing this world; but still, such as I am, I offer myself to God; He will take pity on me, I hope; He who has visited me with so much suffering, and has not willed that I should succumb to my suffering.'

Remy, who had listened to these words, slowly rose, and went straight to his mistress.

'You abandon me?' he said, in a sombre voice.

'For God,' replied Diana, lifting towards heaven her hand, pale and thin as that of the sublime Magdalen.

'Is it true?' replied Remy, letting his head fall on his bosom; 'is it true?'

And as Diana dropped her hand, he took it in his two arms, pressed it to his bosom as he would have done to the relic of a saint.

'Oh! what am I in the presence of these two hearts?' sighed the young man, with a fearful shudder.

'You are,' replied Diana, 'the only human creature upon whom I have twice bent my eyes, since I condemned my eyes to close themselves for ever.'

Henri kneeled.

'Thanks, madame,' he said, 'you have revealed yourself to me entirely; thanks, I see clearly my destiny; from this hour not a word from my lips, not an aspiration from my heart, shall betray the one you love; you belong to the Seigneur, madame; I am not jealous of God.'

He had concluded these words, and risen, penetrated with that regenerating charm which accompanies every grand and immutable resolution, when in the plain, still covered with the vapours that were clearing away by degrees, echoed the sound of distant trumpets.

The gendarmes rushed to their weapons, and were mounted before the command.

Henri listened.

'Gentlemen! gentlemen!' he exclaimed, 'they are the trumpets of the admiral; I recognise them. Oh! may they announce my brother!'

'You see that you still wish for something,' said Diana

to him; 'and that you still love some one; why then will you choose despair, child, like those who no longer desire anything, like those who no longer love any one?'

'A horse!' exclaimed Henri; 'let them lend me a horse!'

'But which way will you leave,' said the ensign; 'since the water surrounds us on all sides?'

'Why you can clearly see that the plain is practicable; you must be certain that they march, as their trumpets sound.'

'Mount to the top of the bank, Monsieur the Count,' replied the ensign, 'the weather is clearing, and perhaps you may be able to see.'

'I will go there,' said the young man.

And Henri advanced to the eminence pointed out by the ensign; the trumpets still sounded at intervals, without approaching or retreating.

Remy had resumed his place near Diana.

CHAPTER LXXIII

THE TWO BROTHERS

IN a quarter of an hour Henri returned; he had seen, and every one could see likewise, on a hill, which the darkness had prevented them from distinguishing, a considerable detachment of French troops, cantoned and entrenched.

With the exception of a large ditch or water which surrounded the hamlet occupied by the gendarmes of Annis, the plain commenced clearing itself like a pond being emptied, the natural declivity of the ground drawing the water towards the sea, and several points of land, more elevated than the others, began to reappear as after a deluge.

The slimy mud of the running water had covered the whole country, and it was a mournful spectacle to see, as by degrees the wind drove away the veil of mist, half a hundred cavaliers sinking in the mud, and striving to gain, without succeeding, either the hamlet or the hill.

From the hill their cries of distress had been heard, and this was the reason of the sounding incessantly.

As soon as the wind had succeeded in dispersing the misty vapours, Henri perceived, on the hill, the standard of France, unrolling itself superbly in the wind.

The gendarmes, on their part, hoisted the pennant of Annis, and on both sides, peals of musketry were fired in sign of joy.

Towards eleven o'clock, the sun appeared on this scene of desolation, drying up some parts of the plain, and rendering practicable the crest of a sort of road of communication.

Henri who attempted this path, was the first to perceive, from the sound of his horse's shoes, that a hard road led, by making a circular turn, from the hamlet to the hill; he concluded from this that the horses would sink from the hoof to half-way up the leg, or even to the breast perhaps, in the mud, but would sink no farther, supported as they would be by the solid foundation of the ground.

He requested to make a trial, and as no one concurred with him in the dangerous attempt, he recommended to the ensign, Remy and his companion, and ventured on his perilous journey.

At the same time he left the hamlet, a cavalier was seen to descend the hill, and as Henri did, attempt on his side to reach the hamlet.

The whole side of the hill looking towards the hamlet, was filled with soldiers as spectators, who raised their arms to heaven, and seemed determined to arrest the imprudent cavalier by their supplications.

The two deputies of the two trunks of the immense French corps, courageously pursued their road, and they soon discovered, that their task was less difficult than they had feared, and especially than had been feared on their account.

A large stream of water that escaped from an aqueduct destroyed by the shock of a beam, issued from beneath the mud, and washed, as if designedly, the miry road, discovering under its more limpid wave, the foundation of the fosse, searched for by the active feet of the horses.

Already were the cavaliers within two hundred paces of each other.

'France!' cried the cavalier who came from the hill.

And he raised his cap shaded with a white plume.

'Oh! 'tis you,' exclaimed Henri, with a cry of joy. 'you, monseigneur.'

'You, Henri, you, my brother!' exclaimed the other cavalier.

And at the risk of deviating to the right or left, the two cavaliers started at a gallop, approaching each other; and presently, to the frenetic acclamations of the spectators of the hamlet and the hill, the two cavaliers embraced one another long and tenderly.

Immediately, the hill and the hamlet were deserted; gendarmes and light horse, Huguenot and Catholic gentlemen, threw themselves on the road opened by the two brothers.

The two camps were soon joined; arms were opened, and on the road where all had expected to meet death, three thousand Frenchmen returned thanks to Heaven and shouted, 'Vive la France!'

'Gentlemen,' said, on a sudden, the voice of a Huguenot officer, 'it is "Vive the Admiral," we must cry, for 'tis to the Duke de Joyeuse, and not to another, that we owe our lives to-night, and this morning the happiness of embracing our compatriots.'

An immense acclamation acknowledged these words.

The two brothers exchanged a few words, moistened with tears: and the elder,—

'And the duke?' demanded Joyeuse of Henri.

'He is dead, as it appears,' replied the latter.

'Is the news certain?'

'The gendarmes of Annis have seen his horse, drowned, and recognised him by a sign. The horse was still dragging in his stirrup a horseman, whose head was buried under water.'

'Tis a mournful day for France,' said the admiral.

And turning towards his men.

'Come, gentlemen,' he said in a loud voice, 'let us not lose time; when once the waters have retired, we shall probably be attacked; let us entrench ourselves, until news and provisions reach us.'

'But, monseigneur,' replied a voice, 'the cavalry cannot march; the horses have not eaten since four o'clock yesterday, and the poor beasts are dying of hunger.'

'There is grain in our encampment,' said the ensign; 'but how shall we manage for the men?'

'Eh!' replied the admiral, 'if there is grain, 'tis all I ask; the men will live as the horses.'

'My brother,' interrupted Henri, 'contrive, I beg of you, that I may speak with you for a moment.'

'I intend to occupy the hamlet,' replied Joyeuse, 'choose a lodging for me, and await me there.'

Henri rejoined his two companions.

'You are here in the midst of an army,' he said to Remy: 'trust to me, conceal yourselves in the lodging I shall take; it is not proper that madame should be seen by any one. To-night, when all sleep, I will take measures to free you.'

Remy then installed himself with Diana, in the lodging given up to them by the ensign of the gendarmes, now become once more, by the arrival of Joyeuse, a simple officer under the orders of the admiral.

About two o'clock, the Duke de Joyeuse entered the hamlet, with trumpets sounding, had his troops lodged, and gave strict injunctions, that all disorders should be avoided.

He then ordered a distribution of barley to the men, oats to the horses, and water to all; distributed to the wounded some barrels of beer and wine, which they found in the cellars; and himself, in sight of all, dined off a morsel of black bread and a glass of water, all the while inspecting the posts.

Everywhere he was received as a saviour, with cries of love and gratitude.

'Well, well,' he said, on his return and being alone with his brother, 'let the Flamands come and I will beat them; and even, should it last, I will eat them, for I am very hungry;' and he added softly to Henri, throwing into a corner his bread which he had seemed to bite with such enthusiasm, 'this is an execrable nourishment.'

And throwing his arms round his neck.

'There, now, friend, let us talk; and tell me how 't is you are in Flanders, when I thought you in Paris?'

'My brother,' said Henri to the admiral, 'life became insupportable to me in Paris, and I quitted, to rejoin you in Flanders.'

'Still for love?' inquired Joyeuse.

'No, from despair. At present, I can swear it to you, Anne, I am no longer amorous; my passion is sadness.'

'My brother, my brother,' exclaimed Joyeuse, 'allow me to tell you that you have fallen upon a miserable woman.'

'How so?'

'Yes, Henri, it happens, that to a certain extent of wickedness or virtue, human beings overstep the will of the Creator, and render themselves murderers and homicides, which the church equally reproves; thus, from too much virtue, take no account of the sufferings of another.'

'Oh! my brother, my brother,' exclaimed Henri, 'do not calumniate virtue.'

'Oh! I do not calumniate virtue, Henri; I accuse vice, nothing more. I repeat then, this woman is a miserable woman, and her possession, however desirable it may be, will never be worth the torments she has made you suffer. Eh! my God! 'tis in such cases we should use our strength and our power; for we defend ourselves legitimately, very far from attacking, from the devil. Henri, I know well that in your place, I would have taken by assault the house of this woman; I would have taken herself, as I would have taken her house; and afterwards when, from the custom of every creature tamed, that becomes as humble before its captor, as it was ferocious before the struggle; when she had come to throw her arms round your neck, saying; "Henri, I adore you," then would I have repulsed her, replying, "you do well, madame; 'tis your turn, and I have suffered enough, for you to suffer also!"'

Henri seized the hand of his brother.

'You do not believe a word of what you now advance, Joyeuse?' he said.

'Yes, by my faith.'

'You, so good, so generous!'

'Generosity with people without hearts, 'tis trickery, brother.'

'Oh! Joyeuse, Joyeuse, you do not know this woman.'

'A thousand devils! I do not wish to know her.'

'Why so?'

'Because she would make me commit what some would call a crime, but what I should call an act of justice.'

'Oh! my kind brother,' said the young man, with an angelic smile, 'how happy you are at not loving! But if you please, Monseigneur the Admiral, let us leave my foolish love, and talk of matters of war.'

'Be it so, for in talking of your folly you drive me mad.'

'You see that we want provisions.'

'I know it, and I have already thought of the means of procuring some.'

'And have you found some.'

'I think I have.'

'How ?'

'I cannot budge from hence until I have received news of the army, seeing that our position is good, and that I shall defend it against five times the force. But I can send out a corps of skirmishers. They will obtain news at first, which is the real life of men reduced to the situation in which we are; provisions next, for in reality this Flanders is a fine country.'

'Not too much so, my brother, not too much so.'

'Oh ! I only speak of the world such as God has made it, and not of men who eternally spoil the work of God. Conceive, Henri, what a folly this prince has committed; what a chance he has lost; how pride and hastiness have quickly ruined this unfortunate Francis. God has his soul, let us speak no more of it; but really he might have acquired an immortal glory, and one of the finest kingdoms of Europe, whilst he has done the work of that of William the Sullen. For the rest, do you know, Henri, that the Antwerpens fought well ?'

'And you also, as I am told, my brother.'

'Yes, I was in one of my best days, and besides there was one thing that excited me.'

'Which ?'

'Why, that I encountered, on the field of battle, a sword of my acquaintance.'

'A Frenchman ?'

'A Frenchman.'

'In the ranks of the Flemish ?'

'At their head, Henri. This is a secret we must know, to give a sequel to the quartering of Salcède in the Place de Grève.'

'Well, dear seigneur, you are returned safe and sound, to my great joy, but I who have done nothing as yet, must certainly accomplish something.'

'And what would you do ?'

'Give me the command of your reconnoitring party.'

'No, 'tis really too dangerous, Henri. I would not say so to you before strangers; but I would not have you die an obscure death, and consequently an ugly death. The scouts might encounter a corps

of these villainous Flamands who fight with scythes and flails; you kill a thousand of them; there remains one, and he cuts you in two, or disfigures you. No, Henri, no; if you are positively resolved to die, I have something in reserve for you better than that.'

'My brother, grant me what I ask of you, I beg; I will take every prudent measure, and I promise you to return here.'

'Oh! I understand.'

'What do you understand?'

'You would try if the lustre of some brilliant action, would not soften the heart of this obstinate one. Confess that this is the reason of your persistence.'

'I will admit it, if you wish, my brother.'

'Well, you are right. Women who resist a desperate love, yield themselves sometimes to a little noise.'

'I hope not so.'

'Triple fool that you are, then, if you do it without hope. Stay, Henri, seek no other reason for the refusal of this woman, unless she is a capricious one that has neither heart nor eyes.'

'You give me the command, eh, my brother?'

'It must be so, since you will have it.'

'I can depart this very night?'

'Tis imperative, Henri; you see that we cannot wait longer.'

'How many men will you place at my disposition?'

'A hundred men, no more. I cannot strip my position, Henri; you will understand that.'

'Less, if you like, my brother.'

'No, for I would willingly give you the double. Only, engage me your word of honour, that if you have an affair with more than three hundred men, you will beat a retreat instead of getting yourself killed.'

'My brother,' said Henri, smiling, 'you sell me very dear, a glory that you do not give me.'

'In that case, my dear Henri, I will neither give it you nor sell it you; another officer shall command the reconnoitring party.'

'My brother, give your orders, and I will execute them.'

'You will not engage in combat, then, but with equal, double, or treble odds; you will not exceed this?'

'I swear it you.'

'Very well; now what corps will you have?'

'Let me take a hundred men of the gendarmes of Annis; I have a good number of friends in this regiment, and, in choosing my men, I shall do as I like.'

'Tis settled, then, for the gendarmes of Annis.'

'When shall I depart?'

'Immediately. But you will have rations distributed to the men for one day, and to the horses for two. Remember that I desire to have prompt and certain news.'

'I go, my brother; have you any secret order?'

'Do not report the death of the duke; let it be believed he is in my camp. Exaggerate my forces, and if you find the body of the prince, although he was a bad man and a poor general, as, at all events, he was of the house of France, have him placed in an oaken shell, and brought back by your gendarmes, that he may be interred at Saint Denis.'

'Very well, my brother, is this all?'

'This is all.'

Henri took the hand of his brother to kiss it, but the latter pressed him in his arms.

'Once more, Henri, you promise me,' said Joyeuse, 'tis not a ruse you employ, to get yourself killed bravely?'

'My brother: I had this idea on joining you; but I can swear to you I have it no longer.'

'And since when has it left you?'

'About two hours.'

'On what occasion?'

'My brother, excuse me.'

'Go, Henri, go; your secrets are your own.'

'Oh! you are very kind, my brother!'

And the young men a second time embraced each other, and separated, not without looking back, not without saluting one another with a smile and with the hand.

CHAPTER LXXIV

THE EXPEDITION

HENRI, transported with joy, hastened to rejoin Remy and Diana.

'Hold yourselves ready; in a quarter of an hour,' he said to them, 'we depart. You will find two horses ready

saddled at the little door of the wooden staircase which abuts on the corridor; mix in our suite and whisper not a word.'

And appearing at the balcony of the house :—

'Trumpeters of the gendarmes,' he cried, 'sound to horse.'

The appeal resounded immediately through the hamlet, and the ensign and his men ranged themselves in front of the house.

Their men came behind them with some mules and two carts. Remy and his companion, following the advice given them, glided into the midst of them.

'Gendarmes,' said Henri, 'my brother, the admiral has given me temporarily the command of your company, and has commissioned me to go to reconnoitre; a hundred of you are to accompany me; the mission is dangerous, but 'tis for the safety of all that you are to go forward. Who are the men that will volunteer.'

The three hundred men presented themselves.

'Gentlemen,' said Henri, 'I thank you all; it is with reason they have said you were the example of the army, but I can only take a hundred men from amongst you; I would not make a choice, chance shall decide.'

'Sir,' continued Henri, addressing the ensign, 'draw lots, if you please.'

Whilst they proceeded with this operation, Joyeuse gave his last instructions to his brother.

'Listen well, Henri,' said the admiral, 'the country is drying up; there ought to exist, as the countrymen assure us, a communication between Conticq and Rupelmonde; you will march between a small river and a large one, the Rupel and the Scheld; for the Scheld, you will find, before Rupelmonde, boats brought from Antwerp; it is not indispensable to pass the Rupel. I hope you will not have occasion to go as far as Rupelmonde, to find magazines of provisions or windmills.'

Henri, with these words, prepared to leave.

'Stay a moment,' said Joyeuse, 'you forget the principal; my men have taken three peasants, I give you one to serve you as a guide. No false pity; at the first appearance of treason, use the pistol or the poniard.'

This last point arranged, he tenderly embraced his brother, and gave the order for marching.

The hundred men drawn in lots by the ensign, du

Bouchage at their head, put themselves *en route* at the same moment.

Henri placed the guide between two gendarmes, constantly holding a pistol in their hands.

Remy and his companion, had mixed with the men of the suite.

Henri had given no instructions respecting them, thinking that curiosity was already fully excited on their account, without further augmenting it by precautions more dangerous than salutary.

Himself, without having fatigued or importuned his guests by a single look, after having left the hamlet, returned and took his place at the flanks of his company.

The march of the troop was slow, the road at times gave way suddenly under the horses' feet, and the whole detachment found itself entangled.

Until they had found the path they sought for, they were compelled to march as if shackled.

Sometimes spectres flying at the sound of the horses, cut across the plain; these were the peasants, a little too prompt in returning to their grounds, and who feared falling into the hands of their enemies, whom they had endeavoured to annihilate.

At times also, there were the unfortunate Frenchmen, half dead with cold and hunger, incapable of struggling against armed men, and who, uncertain of falling upon friends or foes, preferred waiting for the day to resume their painful route.

They made two leagues in three hours; these three hours had conducted the adventurous patrol to the borders of the Rupel, which glided along a paved road, but now dangers succeeded to difficulties, two or three horses lost their footing in the interstices of these stones, or sliding on the muddy stones, rolled with their riders into the still rapid current of the river.

Frequently also, from some boat anchored on the opposite bank, issued a few shots that wounded two army servants and a gendarme.

One of the valets had been wounded at the side of Diana; she had manifested some regrets for this man, but no regrets for herself.

Henri, in these different circumstances, proved himself for his men a worthy captain and a real friend; he marched the first, forcing the whole troop to follow his

track, and trusting less to his own sagacity than to the instinct of the horse his brother had given him, and so well that in this mode he led every one in safety, himself alone risking death.

About three leagues from Rupelmonde they encountered half a dozen French soldiers, crouching before a turf fire; the unfortunate men were cooking a fore-quarter of horse flesh, the only nourishment they had had for two days.

The approach of the gendarmes caused a great trouble amongst the convives of this mournful feast; two or three rose up to fly, but one of them remained seated and retained them saying :—

‘Well ! if they are enemies, they will kill us, and the affair will at least soon be over.’

‘France ! France !’ cried Henri, who had heard these words, ‘come to us, poor fellows.’

These unfortunates, on recognising their compatriots, ran towards them; they were given cloaks and a glass of Hollands; and the permission was added of mounting behind the valets.

In this manner they followed the detachment.

Half a league farther, they found four light-horse, with one horse amongst the four, they were received in the same way.

At length they arrived on the banks of the Scheld; the darkness was profound; the gendarmes found there two men, who endeavoured, in bad Flemish, to obtain from the boatman a passage across the river.

The latter refused with menaces.

The ensign spoke Dutch. He advanced gently to the head of the column, and whilst the latter halted, he heard these words :—

‘You are Frenchmen, you must die here; you shall not pass.’

One of the two men presented a poniard at his throat, and without giving himself the trouble of attempting to speak his language, said to him, in excellent French :—

“Tis you who shall die here, Flamand as you are, if you do not pass us over this very instant.”

‘Hold firm, sir, hold firm,’ cried the ensign, ‘in five minutes we are with you.’

But during the movement made by the two Frenchmen; in listening to these words, the boatman undid the knot

that held his boat in the river, and rapidly glided away, leaving them on the bank.

But one of the gendarmes, comprehending the utility of the boat, entered the river on his horse, and shot the boatman with his pistol.

The boat, without a guide, turned round of itself; but as it had not reached the middle of the river, the eddy sent it back to the shore.

The two men took possession of it the moment it touched the shore, and installed themselves in it the first.

This eagerness to take care of themselves, astonished the ensign.

'Eh! gentlemen,' he said, 'who are you, if you please?'

'Sir, we are officers of the regiment of the marines, and you gendarmes of Annis, as it seems.'

'Yes, gentlemen, and very happy in being of use to you; do you not mean to accompany us?'

'Willingly, gentlemen.'

'Mount the carts then, if you are too fatigued to follow us on foot.'

'May I ask where you are going?' said him of the two officers who had not yet spoken.

'Sir, our orders are to push as far as Rupelmonde.'

'Take care,' said the same speaker, 'we did not cross the river sooner, because this morning a detachment of Spaniards passed going to Antwerp; at sunset we thought we might risk; two men do not cause suspicion, but you a whole troop.'

'Tis true,' said the ensign, 'I will call our chief.'

He called Henri, who approached, inquiring what was the matter.

'It is,' replied the ensign, 'that these gentlemen encountered, this morning, a detachment of Spaniards who followed the same road as ourselves.'

'And how many were they?' demanded Henri.

'Fifty men.'

'Well! and 'tis this that stops you?'

'No, Monsieur the Count; but still I think it would be prudent to secure the boat at all hazards, twenty men would defend it, and if urgent, to cross the river in five passages, and by holding the horses by the bridle the operation would be terminated.'

'Tis well,' said Henri, 'let them guard the boat, there should be houses here at the junction of the Rupel and the Scheld.'

'There is a village,' said a voice.

'Let us go there; the angle formed by the junction of the two rivers is a good position. Gendarmes, march! let two men descend the river with the boat, whilst we follow the bank.'

'We will direct the boat,' said one of the two officers, 'if you wish it.'

'Be it so, gentlemen,' said Henri; 'but do not lose sight of us, and rejoin us the moment we are installed in the village.'

'But if we abandon the boat, and they retake it?'

'You will find, at a hundred paces from the village, a post of ten men, to whom you will deliver it.'

'Tis well,' said the officer of marine, and with a vigorous stroke of the oar he pulled into the river.

'Tis singular,' said Henri, continuing his march, 'that is a voice that I know.'

An hour afterwards, he found the village guarded by the detachment of Spaniards, of whom the officer had spoken; surprised at the moment they least expected it, they made but a slight resistance.

Henri had the prisoners disarmed, confined them in the strongest house of the village, and placed a piquet of ten men to guard them.

Another post of ten men were sent to guard the boat.

Ten other men were dispersed as sentinels on different points, with a promise of being relieved in the course of an hour.

Henri afterwards decided that they should sup twenty at a time, in the house opposite the one in which the prisoners were confined. The supper of the fifty or sixty first was soon ready.

Henri chose, on the first landing, a chamber for Diana and Remy, whom he was anxious should not sup with the rest.

He placed at the table the ensign with seventeen men, charging him to invite to sup with him the two officers of marine, guardians of the boat.

He then went, before placing himself at table, to visit the men in their different positions.

In about half an hour, Henri returned. This half-hour

had sufficed him to see to the lodging and nourishment of all his men, and to give the necessary orders, in case of a surprise by the Hollanders.

The officers, despite his invitation not to disturb themselves about him, had waited for him, to commence their repast; they had simply placed themselves at table; some were asleep on their chairs from fatigue.

The entrance of the count awoke the sleepers, and brought those awake on their legs.

Henri threw a glance round the hall. Copper lamps, suspended from the ceiling, gave out a smoky light.

The table, covered with wheaten bread and pork, with a jug of fresh beer for each man, had an enticing aspect for men who for the last twenty-four hours had not eaten at all.

They indicated to Henri, the place of honour. He seated himself.

'Eat, gentlemen,' he said.

Immediately the permission was given, the sound of knives and forks on the plates of delf ware, proved to Henri, that they had waited for it with some impatience, and received with a supreme satisfaction.

'By the way,' said Henri, to the ensign, 'have they found our two officers of the marine?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Where are they?'

'There, at the end of the table.'

Not only were they seated at the end of the table, but also at the most obscure spot in the room.

'Messieurs,' said Henri, 'you are badly placed, and you do not eat, I think.'

'Thanks, Monsieur the Count,' replied one of them, 'we are very fatigued, and we have really more need of rest than food; we have already said so to your officers, but they have insisted, saying it was your order we should sup with you. It is a great honour for us, and for which we are very grateful. But nevertheless, if, instead of keeping us longer, you would have the kindness to order a chamber for us.'

Henri had listened with the most profound attention, but it was evident that it was indeed rather the voice, than the words, that he listened to.

'And 'tis also the opinion of your companion?' said Henri, when the officer of marine had ceased speaking.

And he looked at this companion, who kept his hat drawn over his eyes, and persisted in not speaking a word, with an attention so profound, that several of the convives also commenced looking at him.

The latter, forced to reply to the question of the count, articulated in a tone almost unintelligible, these two words.

'Yes, count.'

At these two words, the count started.

Then, rising, he walked straight to the lower end of the table, whilst those present followed with a singular attention the movements of Henri, and the very evident manifestation of astonishment.

Henri stopped close to the two officers.

'Sir,' he said to the one who had spoken first, 'do me a favour.'

'Wherein, Monsieur the Count?'

'Assure me that you are not the brother of M. Aurilly, or perhaps M. Aurilly himself.'

'Aurilly!' exclaimed every one present.

'And that your companion,' continued Henri, 'would kindly raise a little the hat that hides his face, without which I shall call him monseigneur, and shall bow before him.'

And at the same time, Henri, hat in hand, bowed respectfully to the unknown.

The latter raised his head.

'Monseigneur the Duke of Anjou!' exclaimed the officers.

'The duke alive!'

'My faith, gentlemen,' said the officer, 'since you will kindly recognise your prince, vanquished and fugitive, I shall no longer resist this manifestation, for which I am grateful to you; you are not deceived, messieurs, I am really the Duke of Anjou!'

'Long live monseigneur!' exclaimed the officers.

CHAPTER LXXV

PAUL EMILIUS

ALL these acclamations terrified the prince, sincere as they were.

'Oh! silence, silence, gentlemen,' he said, 'be not more satisfied than myself, I beg of you, for the happiness that has come to me. I am enchanted at not having died, I beg you to believe; and yet if you had not recognised me, I should not have been the first to boast of being alive.'

'What! monseigneur,' said Henri, 'you had recognised me, you find yourself in the midst of a troop of French, you see us in despair at your loss, and you leave us in the grief of having lost you!'

'Messieurs,' replied the prince, 'besides a crowd of reasons which induced me to guard the incognito, I avow, since I was supposed dead, that I should not have been sorry for this opportunity, which will not again probably present itself in my lifetime, of knowing a little what funereal oration would be pronounced over my tomb.'

'Monseigneur, monseigneur!'

'No, really,' replied the duke, 'I am a man like Alexander of Macedon; I make war with skill and take some pride in it, like all artists. Well! without vanity, I have, I think, committed a fault.'

'Monseigneur,' said Henri, looking down, 'do not say such things, I entreat you.'

'Why not? It is not only the pope who is infallible, and since Boniface the Eighth, this same infallibility has been much discussed.'

'See to what you exposed us, monseigneur, if any of us had permitted ourselves to give our opinion on this expedition, and that this opinion had been a blame.'

'Well! why not? Do you think I have not already much blamed myself, not for having delivered battle, but for having lost it?'

'Monseigneur, this kindness alarms us, and your highness will allow me to say so, this gaiety is not natural. Will your highness be good enough to reassure us, by saying that you do not suffer?'

A terrible cloud passed over the features of the prince.

'Not so, not so,' he said; 'I was never better, thank God, than at this moment, and I feel myself happy in the midst of you.'

The officers bowed.

'How many men under your orders du Bouchage?' demanded the duke.

'A hundred and fifty, monseigneur.'

'Ah! ah! a hundred and fifty out of twelve thousand, 'tis the proportion of the disaster of Cannes, gentlemen; they will send a bushel of your rings to Antwerp, but I doubt if the Flemish beauties can make use of them, unless they sharpen their fingers with the knives of their husbands; they cut well, these knives!'

'Monseigneur,' continued du Bouchage, 'if our battle is a battle of Cannes, we are more lucky than the Romans, for we have preserved our Paul Emilius.'

'On my soul, messieurs,' said the duke, 'the Paul Emilius of Antwerp is Joyeuse, and no doubt, to push the resemblance to the end, with his heroic model, your brother is dead, is he not, du Bouchage?'

Henri felt his heart torn by this freezing question.

'No, monseigneur,' he said, 'he lives.'

'Ah! so much the better,' said the duke, with a cold smile; 'what! our brave Joyeuse has survived. Where is he that I may embrace him?'

'He is not here, monseigneur.'

'Ah! yes, wounded?'

'No, monseigneur, safe and sound.'

'But a fugitive, like myself, wandering, hungry, a poor and houseless warrior. Alas! the proverb is very right, for glory the sword, after the sword blood, after blood tears.'

'Monseigneur, I was ignorant of the proverb, and I am glad, despite the proverb, to inform your highness that my brother has had the happiness of saving three thousand men, with whom he occupies a large village about seven leagues from hence; and such as your highness sees me, I march as a scout of his army.'

The duke became pale.

'Three thousand men,' he said; 'and 'tis Joyeuse who has saved these three thousand men. Do you know that your brother is a Xenophon? It is, by God! very lucky that *my* brother has sent me *yours*, without which

I should have returned alone to France. Long live Joyeuse ! pardieu ! alas for the house of Valois, 'tis not her who can take it for her device : "*Hilariter !*"

'Monseigneur ! oh ! monseigneur !' murmured du Bouchage, choked with grief, seeing that this gaiety of the prince concealed a sombre and painful jealousy.

'No, on my soul, I say true, do I not, Aurilly ? We return to France, like Francis the First, after the battle of Pavia. All is lost, even to honour ! ah ! ah ! ah ! I have found the device of the house of France.'

A mournful silence acknowledged this heartrending burst of laughter, as though they had been sobs.

'Monseigneur,' interrupted Henri, 'recount to me how the tutelary angel of France saved your highness.'

'Eh ! dear count, 'tis very simple; the tutelary god of France was occupied, no doubt, in matters of much greater importance at that moment, so that I was saved by myself alone.'

'And how so, monseigneur ?'

'Why, by my legs.'

Not a smile acknowledged this pleasantry, which the duke would certainly have punished with death, if it had been made by any other than himself.

'Yes, yes, 'tis really the word, heim ! as we ran,' he continued; 'is it not so, my brave Aurilly ?'

'Every one,' said Henri, 'knows the cool bravery, and the military genius of your highness; we therefore entreat you not to tear our hearts, by acknowledging wrongs that you have not. The best general is not invincible, and Hannibal himself was vanquished at Zama.'

'Yes,' replied the duke, 'but Hannibal had gained the battles of Trebius, Trasimene, and of Cannes, whilst I have only gained that of Cateau Cambresis, which is not enough, in truth, to sustain the comparison.'

'But monseigneur jests when he says he fled ?'

'No, my faith ! I do not jest; besides do you find here anything to jest upon, du Bouchage.'

'Could we do otherwise, Monsieur the Count ?' said Aurilly, thinking it time to come to the assistance of his master.

'Silence, Aurilly,' said the duke; 'ask the shade of Saint Aignan if we could have done else than fly.'

Aurilly bent down his head.

'Ah ! you know not the history of Saint Aignan, it's true; I will narrate it you; it might be divided into three grimaces.'

At this pleasantry which, under the circumstances, had something odious, the officers frowned, without troubling themselves as to whether they pleased or displeased their master.

'Imagine then, messieurs,' said the prince, without appearing to have noticed in the least this sign of disapprobation; 'imagine that it was at the moment the battle was declared lost, he assembled five hundred cavalry, and instead of marching away like the rest, he came to me and said :—

"We must attack, monseigneur."

"How attack?" I replied to him; "you are mad, Saint Aignan, they are a hundred against one."

"Were it a thousand," he replied with a frightful grimace, "I shall attack."

"Attack, my dear, attack," I replied, "I do not attack; on the contrary."

"You will give me your horse, however, which cannot march; and you will take mine, which is fresh; as I will not fly, any horse is good for me."

'And in fact he took my white horse, and gave me his black one, saying :—

"Prince, here is a racer who will make twenty leagues in four hours, if you desire it."

'And turning towards his men :—

"Come, gentlemen," he said, "follow me; forward, those who would not turn their backs!"

'And he spurred towards the enemy with a second grimace more frightful than the first.

'He expected to find men, he found water; I had foreseen the event. Saint Aignan and his Paladins rest there.

'If he had listened to me instead of showing this useless prowess, we should have him at this table, and he would not at this hour be making a third grimace, more ugly, probably, than either of the two former.'

A shudder of horror ran through the circle of those present.

'The miserable has no heart!' thought Henri. 'Ah! why do his misfortune, his disgrace, and especially his birth, protect him from the appeal they would be so glad to address to him?'

'Messieurs,' said Aurilly softly, who felt the terrible effect produced in this auditory of courageous men by the words of the prince, 'you see how monseigneur is

affected, pay no attention therefore to his words; since the misfortune that has happened to him, I think that he has really moments of delirium.'

'Eh! this is how Saint Aignan died,' said the prince, emptying his glass, 'and how I live; for the rest, in dying he has rendered me a last service; he has made it believed, as he mounted my horse, that it was me who had died; so that the reports spread not only through the French army, but also through the Flemish army, who then relaxed in its pursuit of me. But reassure yourselves, messieurs, our good Flamands will not carry the matter into Paradise; we shall have our revenge, messieurs, and a bloody one; and since yesterday I have organised, mentally at least, the most formidable army that ever existed.'

'In the meantime, monseigneur,' said Henri, 'your highness shall take the command of my men; it no longer belongs to me, a simple gentleman, to give a single order where there is a prince of France.'

'Be it so,' said the prince, 'and I commence by ordering every one to sup, and you particularly, Monsieur du Bouchage, for you have not even approached your plate.'

'Monseigneur, I am not hungry.'

'In that case, du Bouchage, my friend, return and visit the posts. Announce to the chiefs that I live, but beg them not to rejoice too loud, before we have gained a better citadel, or rejoined the body of the army of our invincible Joyeuse; for I confess to you that I wish less than ever to be taken, now that I have escaped fire and water.'

'Monseigneur, your highness shall be obeyed to the letter, and no one shall know, except these gentlemen, that you do us the honour to reside with us.'

'And these gentlemen will guard my secret?' demanded the duke.

Every one bowed.

'Go to your visit, count.'

Du Bouchage left the hall.

As we have seen, it required but an instant for this vagabond, this fugitive, this vanquished, to again become proud, indifferent, and imperious.

To command a hundred men, or a hundred thousand, was still to command. The Duke of Anjou would have acted the same with Joyeuse. Princes seldom demand what they think they merit, but what they think is due to them.

Whilst du Bouchage executed the order, with the

greater punctuality, that he might not appear to obey in spite, Francis questioned, and Aurilly, that shadow of the master, who followed all his movements, questioned also.

The duke found it astonishing that a man of the name and rank of du Bouchage, had consented thus to take the command of a handful of men, and had charged himself with an expedition so perilous.

It was in fact the post of a simple ensign, and not that of the brother of a grand-admiral.

With the prince all was suspicion, and every suspicion required to be cleared up.

He insisted, therefore, and learnt that the grand-admiral, in placing his brother at the head of the reconnoitring party, had only yielded to his pressing entreaties.

The one who gave this information to the duke, and who gave it without any ill intention, was the ensign of the gendarmes of Annis, who had received du Bouchage, and had given up his command, as du Bouchage had just given up his to the duke.

The prince thought he perceived a slight sentiment of irritability in the heart of the ensign against du Bouchage; and this was the reason of his so particularly questioning the latter.

'But,' said the prince, 'what was the intention of the count, that he solicited so urgently such a poor command?'

'To render a service to the army in the first place,' said the ensign, 'and of this sentiment I have no doubt.'

'“In the first place?” you said; what is the *sequel*, sir?'

'Oh! monseigneur,' said the ensign, 'I do not know.'

'You deceive me, or deceive yourself, sir, you see.'

'Monseigneur, I cannot give, even to your highness, but the reasons of my service.'

'You see,' said the prince, turning towards the few officers remaining at the table, 'I was perfectly right in keeping myself concealed, gentlemen, since there are in my army secrets from which I am excluded.'

'Oh! monseigneur,' exclaimed the ensign, 'your highness but ill comprehends my discretion; there are no secrets in it but what concern M. du Bouchage. Could it not happen, for example, that whilst serving the general interest, M. Henri might wish to render a service to some relation or some friend, by escorting him?'

'Who then is here, friend or relation of the count? Name him to me, that I may embrace him!'

'Monseigneur,' said Aurilly, mixing himself in the conversation with that respectful familiarity to which he was accustomed, 'monseigneur, I have just discovered a part of the secret, and there is nothing that can occasion the suspicion of your highness. This relation whom M. du Bouchage wishes to escort, well !'

'Well !' said the prince, 'finish, Aurilly.'

'Well ! monseigneur, 'tis a fair relation.'

'Oh ! oh ! oh !' exclaimed the duke, 'why did they not tell me the affair frankly ? That dear Henri ! Eh ! why it's very natural. Come, come, let us shut our eyes on the female relative, and say no more about it.'

'Your highness will do so the better,' said Aurilly, 'as the thing is one of the most mysterious.'

'How so ?'

'Yes, the lady—like the celebrated Bradamantine, whose history I have twenty times sung to your highness—the lady disguises herself in the dress of a man.'

'Oh ! monseigneur,' said the ensign, 'I entreat you. The count appeared to me to have great respect for this lady, and in all probability, he would think himself insulted at too much indiscretion.'

'No doubt, no doubt, Monsieur the ensign, we will be as dumb as sepulchres; be tranquil, dumb, as the poor Saint Aignan. But if we see the lady, we shall endeavour not to make grimaces at her. Ah ! Henri has a relation with him, in the midst of the gendarmes ? and where is this fair relative, Aurilly ?'

'Overhead.'

'How, above, in this house ?'

'Yes, monseigneur; but, chut, here is M. du Bouchage.'

'Chut !' repeated the prince, bursting into a laugh.

CHAPTER LXXVI

ONE OF THE SOUVENIRS OF THE DUKE OF ANJOU

THE young man, on entering, could hear the fatal laughter of the prince, but he had not lived long enough near his highness, to be aware of all the menaces contained in a joyous manifestation of the Duke of Anjou.

He could also perceive, from the trouble of some physiognomies, that a hostile conversation had been held by the duke in his absence, and interrupted by his return.

But Henri had not sufficient distrust to guess to what it referred. No one was so closely his friend to inform him of it in the presence of the duke.

Besides, Aurilly made a good guard, and the duke, who, without the least doubt, had already nearly arranged his plan, retained Henri near his person, until all the officers present at the conversation had moved away.

The duke had made some changes in the disposition of the posts.

Thus, when he was alone, Henri had judged it proper to make himself the centre, since he was chief, and to establish his headquarters in the house of Diana.

Besides, to the most important post after this, and which was that of the river, he sent the ensign.

The duke became chief in the room of Henri, took the place of Henri, and sent Henri where the latter had sent the ensign.

Henri was not astonished at this. The prince had perceived that this point was the most important, and he confided it to him; it was a very natural thing, so natural, that every one, and Henri the first, agreed in his intention.

But he thought it his duty to give the ensign a recommendation, and approached him. It was very natural also that he should place under his protection the two persons over whom he watched, and whom he would be compelled, for the moment at least, to abandon.

But at the first words Henri attempted to exchange with the ensign, the duke interfered.

'Secrets !' he said, with his smile.

The gendarme had understood, but too late, the indiscretion he had committed. He repented, and willing to come to the assistance of the count :—

'No, monseigneur,' he replied; 'M. the Count simply demands of me, how many pounds of powder remain in a state to be served.'

This reply had two objects, if not two results; the first to turn the suspicions of the duke, if he had any; the second, to indicate to the count, that he had an auxiliary upon whom he could rely.

'Oh ! that's different,' replied the duke, forced to put faith in his words, under the penalty of compromising in the character of a spy, his dignity as a prince.

And whilst the duke turned round towards the door which was opened,—

'His highness knows that you accompany some one,' whispered the ensign to Henri.

Du Bouchage started, but it was too late. This same shudder had not escaped the duke, and, as if to assure himself that the orders had been everywhere executed, he proposed to the count to conduct him to his post, a proposition which the count was compelled to accept.

Henri had wished to warn Remy to keep himself on his guard, and to prepare beforehand some reply. But he had now no means; all that he could do was to dismiss the ensign by these words:—

'Guard well the powder; guard it as I should myself.'

'Yes, Monsieur the Count,' replied the ensign.

On the way the duke inquired of du Bouchage:—

'Where is this powder that you recommend to our young officer, count?'

'In the house where I had placed the headquarters, your highness.'

'Be easy, du Bouchage,' replied the duke, 'I know too well the importance of such a depot, in the situation we are in, not to give it all my attention. 'Tis not our young ensign who shall guard it, but myself.'

The conversation rested here. They arrived, without again speaking, at the confluence of the two rivers; the duke gave du Bouchage a strong recommendation not to quit his post, and returned.

He found Aurilly; the latter had not quitted the supper-room, and, reclined on a bench, slept on the cloak of an officer.

The duke tapped him on the shoulder and awoke him. Aurilly rubbed his eyes and regarded the prince.

'You have heard?' the latter inquired.

'Yes, monseigneur,' replied Aurilly.

'Do you know, however, of what I am speaking?'

'Pardieu! of the unknown lady, of the fair relative of M. the Count du Bouchage.'

'Good; I see that the faro of Brussels, and the beer of Louvain, have not yet too much obscured your brain.'

'Come now, monseigneur, speak, or only make a sign, and your highness shall see that I am more ingenious than ever.'

'Then, let us see; invoke all your imagination to your aid, and guess.'

'Well! monseigneur, I guess that your highness is curious.'

'Ah ! parbleu ! that is an affair of the temperament; tell me simply what piques my curiosity at this moment.'

'You wish to know who is the brave creature, who follows the brothers Joyeuse through fire and through water.'

'*Per mille pericula mortis*, as my sister Margaret would say, if she were here; you have hit the right nail, Aurilly. By the way, have you written to her, Aurilly ?'

'To whom, monseigneur ?'

'To my sister Margaret.'

'Had I to write to Her Majesty ?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'On what ?'

'Why, on our having been beaten, pardieu ! ruined; and that she must look to herself.'

'On what occasion, monseigneur ?'

'On this, that Spain having got rid of me in the north, will tumble upon her in the south.'

'Ah ! very just.'

'You have not written ?'

'No, monseigneur !'

'You were asleep ?'

'Yes, I confess it; but still, if the idea had occurred to me of writing, with what should I have written, monseigneur ? Here I have neither pens, ink, nor paper.'

'Well ! *Quære et invenies*, says the Evangelist.'

'How the devill does your highness expect me to find them in the cabin of a peasant, who, a thousand to one, knows not how to write ?'

'Search, however, imbecile; and if you do not find them—well——'

'Well ?'

'Well ! you will find something else.'

'Oh ! imbecile that I am !' exclaimed Aurilly, striking his forehead; 'my faith, yes ! your highness is right, and my head is muddled; and this comes of my having a frightful desire to sleep, you see, monseigneur !'

'Come, come, I will readily believe you; drive away this desire for a moment, and since you have not written, I will write myself; find me, however, the requisites for writing; search, Aurilly, search, and return not until you have found; for myself I remain here.'

'I go, monseigneur.'

'And if in your search; attend now, if in your search,

you remark that the house has a picturesque style—you know how fond I am of Flemish interiors, Aurilly ?

'Yes, monseigneur.'

'Well ! you will call me.'

'On the very instant, monseigneur; you may rest tranquil.'

Aurilly rose, and light as a bird, he turned his steps towards the adjoining chamber, in which was the base of the staircase.

Aurilly, then, was as light as a bird; so that scarcely was there heard a gentle creak at the moment he placed his foot on the first steps; but no sound discovered his attempt.

In about five minutes, he returned to his master, who had installed himself, as he had said, in the large hall, or supper-room.

'Well ?' demanded the latter.

'Well ! monseigneur, if I am to believe appearances, the house must be most devilishly picturesque.'

'Why so ?'

'Plague, monseigneur, because we cannot enter where we like ?'

'What say you ?'

'I say that a dragoon guards her.'

'What is this foolish pleasantry, my master ?'

'Eh ! monseigneur, unfortunately 'tis not a foolish pleasantry, 'tis a sad truth. The treasure is on the first floor, in a chamber behind a door, under which we can see a light shine.'

'Well ! afterwards ?'

'Monseigneur means before ?'

'Aurilly ?'

'Well ! before this door, monseigneur, is a man lying on the threshold in a large gray cloak.'

'Oh ! oh ! M. du Bouchage permits himself to place a gendarme at the door of his mistress. ?'

'He is not a gendarme, monseigneur, 'tis some valet of the lady and of the count himself.'

'And what sort of a valet ?'

'Monseigneur, impossible to see his face, but what we can see and that perfectly, is a large Flemish knife passed through his belt, and on which he rests a vigorous hand.'

'Tis exciting,' said the duke; 'awaken this galliard a little, for me.'

'Oh! for instance! no, monseigneur.'

'You say?'

'I say, that without reckoning what might happen to me regarding the Flemish knife, I shall not amuse myself by making a mortal enemy of the Messieurs Joyeuse, who stand very well at court. If we had been kings of the Pays Bas, I don't say; but we have only to play the *gracious*, monseigneur, especially with those who have saved us. Take care, monseigneur, if you do not say so, they will say it for you.'

'You are right, Aurilly,' said the duke, stamping with his foot; 'always right, and yet——'

'Yes, I understand, and yet your highness has not seen a solitary female countenance for fifteen mortal days. I do not speak of those sort of animals that people the polders; these do not merit the name of men or of women; they are males and females, nothing more.'

'I would see this mistress of du Bouchage, Aurilly; I will see her, do you hear?'

'Yes, monseigneur, I hear.'

'Well! reply to me then.'

'Well! monseigneur, I reply that you will see her perhaps; but not through the door at least.'

'Be it so,' said the prince, 'but if I cannot see her through the door, I shall see her through the window, at least.'

'Oh! that's an idea, monseigneur, and the proof that I find it excellent, is that I will go and find you a ladder.'

Aurilly glided into the court of the house, and ran against the post of a shed, under which the gendarmes had sheltered their horses.

After a few investigations, Aurilly found what is generally found in an outhouse, that is, a ladder.

He manœuvred amongst the men and animals adroitly enough not to awaken the former, and to avoid the kicks of the latter, and placed the ladder in the street against the exterior wall.

He needed to have been a prince, and hold in sovereign contempt vulgar scruples, as are in general the despots of the right divine, to dare, in sight of the sentinel marching to and fro before the door in which the prisoners were confined, to accomplish an action so audaciously insulting to du Bouchage, as that which the prince was in train to accomplish.

Aurilly comprehended him, and pointed out to the prince, the sentinel, who, not knowing who the two men were, was preparing to cry, 'Who goes there?'

Francis shrugged his shoulders, and went straight to the soldier.

Aurilly followed him.

'My friend,' said the prince, 'this is the most elevated point in the village, is it not?'

'Yes, monseigneur,' said the sentinel, who, recognising Francis, made the salute of honour; 'and were it not for the lime-trees that impede the view, by the light of the moon we should distinguish a part of the country.'

'I thought so,' said the prince; 'I have therefore brought this ladder to look over it. Ascend then, Aurilly, or rather—no, let me mount; a prince should see everything by himself.'

'Where shall I place the ladder, monseigneur?' said the hypocritical valet.

'Why, the first place you come to, for example.'

The ladder applied, the duke mounted.

Whether he suspected the project of the prince, or whether from natural discretion, the sentinel turned his head in an opposite direction to the prince.

The prince reached the top of the ladder; Aurilly remained at the bottom.

The chamber in which Henri had confined Diana, was carpeted with mats, and furnished with a large oaken bed, with curtains of serge, a table, and some chairs.

The young woman, whose heart seemed lightened of a heavy weight, since the false news of the death of the prince, which she had learnt at the camp of the gendarmes of Annis, had demanded of Remy a little nourishment, which the latter had brought up with the eagerness of indescribable joy.

For the first time, then, since the hour when Diana heard of the death of her father, she had tasted a dish more substantial than bread; for the first time she had drunk a few drops of Rhenish wine, which the gendarmes had found in the cellar, and had brought to du Bouchage.

After this repast, light as it was, the blood of Diana, lashed by so many violent emotions, and unknown fatigues, rushed more impetuously to her heart, to which it seemed to have forgotten the way, Remy saw her eyes grow heavy, and her head fall upon her shoulders.

He discreetly retired, and, as we have seen, lay down at the threshold of the door, not that he had the least suspicion, but because, since their departure from Paris, he had acted in the same way.

It was at the conclusion of these dispositions, which assured the tranquillity of the night, that Aurilly had mounted, and had found Remy lying down across the corridor.

Diana also slept, her elbow resting on the table, her head supported by her hand, her delicate and supple body was thrown back sideways against the long-backed chair; the little lamp of iron, placed on the table near the half-garnished plate, lighted this interior, which appeared so calm at the first view, and in which, however, had lately been calmed a tempest, which would soon be relighted.

In the crystal shone, pure as the diamond in fusion, the Rhenish wine, scarcely touched by Diana; this large glass having the shape of a chalice, placed between the lamp and Diana, still further softened the light, and refreshed the complexion of the sleeper.

Her eyes closed, eyes that were marbled with azure, the mouth gently half opened, her hair thrown back over the hood of the coarse dress of a man which she wore, Diana must have appeared as a sublime vision to eyes that were preparing to violate the secret of her retreat.

The duke, on perceiving her, could not restrain a movement of admiration. He leant on the sill of the window, and devoured with his eyes even to the very details of this ideal beauty.

But suddenly in the midst of this contemplation, his eyebrows knitted; he descended two steps with a sort of nervous precipitation.

In this situation the duke was no longer exposed to the luminous reflections of the window, reflections which he appeared to avoid; he turned his back to the wall, folded his arms, and dreamt.

Aurilly, who did not lose sight of him, could see him with his looks lost in vagueness, like those of a man who recalls to his mind the most ancient and most fugitive remembrances.

After ten minutes of reverie and immobility, the duke again mounted to the window, again looked intently through the glass, but did not arrive probably at the

discovery he wished, for the same cloud rested on his forehead, and the same uncertainty in his looks.

He was at this point of his researches, when Aurilly hastily approached the foot of the ladder.

'Quick, quick, monseigneur, descend,' said Aurilly, 'I hear steps at the end of the next street.'

But instead of attending to this advice, the duke descended slowly, still questioning his memory.

'It was time,' said Aurilly.

'From what point comes the noise?' demanded the duke.

'On this side,' said Aurilly, and he extended his hand in the direction of a narrow and gloomy street.

The prince listened.

'I hear nothing more,' he said.

'The person has stopped; 'tis some spy watching us.'

'Take away the ladder,' said the prince.

Aurilly obeyed; the prince, in the meanwhile, seated himself on the stone bench placed on each side of the door of the house.

The noise was not renewed, and no one appeared at the extremity of the street.

Aurilly returned.

'Well! monseigneur,' he inquired, 'is she pretty?'

'Very pretty,' said the prince, in a sombre mood.

'What makes you so sad, then, monseigneur? did she see you?'

'She sleeps.'

'Then what are you so preoccupied about?'

The prince did not reply.

'Brown? blonde?' inquired Aurilly.

'Tis strange, Aurilly,' murmured the prince, 'I have seen this woman somewhere.'

'You recognised her, then?'

'No, for I can assign no name to that countenance; but the sight of her has strangely moved me.'

Aurilly regarded the prince with astonishment, and, with a smile, the irony of which he did not attempt to dissemble:—

'Only see that?' he said.

'Eh! sir, do not laugh, I beg of you,' arily replied Francis; 'do you not see that I am suffering?'

'Oh! monseigneur, is it possible?' said Aurilly.

'Yes, positively, 'tis as I tell you; I know not what

I feel; but,' he added in a sombre air, 'I think I did wrong to look.'

'Yet, precisely on account of the effect the sight of her has produced on you, we must know who this woman is, monseigneur.'

'Certainly we must,' said Francis.

'Search your memory well, monseigneur, is it at the court you have seen her?'

'No, I do not think so.'

'In France; in Navarre; in Flanders?'

'No.'

'She is a Spaniard, perhaps?'

'I do not think so.'

'An Englishwoman? Some lady of Queen Elizabeth?'

'No, no; she must be connected with my life in a more intimate manner; I think she has appeared to me in some terrible circumstance.'

'Then you will easily recognise her, for, thank God! the life of monseigneur has not seen many circumstances pass, such as his highness has just now spoken of.'

'You think so?' said Francis, with a funereal smile.

Aurilly bowed.

'See, I now feel,' said the duke, 'sufficiently master of myself to analyse my sensations; this woman is beautiful, but beautiful as a corpse; beautiful as a shadow; beautiful as the figures we see in dreams; and therefore it seems to me, it is in a dream I have seen her; and,' continued the duke, 'I have had two or three frightful dreams in my life, which have left a sort of chillness in my heart. Well! yes, I am now sure of it; it was in one of those dreams that I saw the woman above there.'

'Monseigneur, monseigneur!' exclaimed Aurilly, 'will your highness permit me to tell you, that rarely have I heard you express so painfully your susceptibility respecting sleep; the heart of your highness is happily tempered in a manner to wrestle with the hardest steel; and the living bite no more than the dead, I hope. Stay, monseigneur, if I did not feel myself under the weight of some eye who is watching us from this street, I would mount, in my turn, the ladder, and, I promise you, I would bring to light this dream, this shadow, this shudder of your highness.'

'My faith, you are right, Aurilly; go and fetch the ladder, fix it and mount; what does the spy matter to you? Are you not mine? Look, Aurilly, look!'

Aurilly had already made some steps to obey his master, when suddenly a hasty step resounded through the place, and Henri cried to the duke :—

'Alarm ! monseigneur, alarm !'

At a single bound Aurilly rejoined the duke.

'You,' said the prince, 'you here, count ? and under what pretexts have you quitted your post ?'

'Monseigneur,' replied Henri, with firmness, 'if your highness thinks it your duty to have me punished, you will do so. In the meantime, my duty was to come here, and I am come.'

The duke with a significant smile, threw a glance at the window.

'Your duty, count ? Explain this to me,' he said.

'Monseigneur, some horsemen have appeared on the banks of the Scheld ; we know not whether they are friends or enemies.'

'Numerous ?' demanded the duke, with uneasiness.

'Very numerous, monseigneur.'

'Well, count, no false bravery, you have done well to return. Have your gendarmes awakened, Let us coast along the river, which is not so wide, and decamp ; 'tis the most prudent part.'

'No doubt, monseigneur, no doubt ; but it is urgent I think, to apprise my brother.'

'Two men will suffice.'

'If two men suffice, monseigneur,' said Henri, 'I will go with a gendarme.'

'No, morbleu,' said Francis hastily, 'no, du Bouchage, you will come with us. Plague ! It is not in such moments that we separate from a defender such as you.'

'Does your highness take the whole escort ?'

'The whole.'

'Tis well, monseigneur,' replied Henri, bowing ; 'at what time will your highness start ?'

'Immediately, count.'

'What ho, there ! Some one,' cried Henri.

The young ensign left the street as if he had only waited for this order of his chief to appear.

Henri gave him his orders, and almost directly were seen the gendarmes assembling from every extremity of the hamlet, and making their preparations for departing.

In the midst of them the duke was conversing with his officers.

'Gentlemen,' he said, 'the Prince of Orange is pursuing me, as it seems; but it is not proper that a son of France be made a prisoner, without the excuse of a battle, as at Poitiers or Pavia. Let us yield to numbers, then, and fall back upon Brussels. I shall be sure of my life and my liberty as long as I shall remain in the midst of you.'

And turning towards Aurilly :—

'You shall remain here,' he said to him; 'this woman cannot follow us; and besides, I know enough of these Joyeuses to be certain that this one would not dare to take his mistress with him in my presence. Moreover, we are not going to a ball, and we shall march at a pace that will fatigue the lady.'

'Where does monseigneur go ?'

'To France; I think my affairs are altogether spoiled here.'

'But to what part of France ? Does monseigneur think it prudent for him to return to court ?'

'No; so, according to all appearances, I shall stop on my road, at one of my dependencies—at Château Thierry, for example.'

'Is your highness fixed ?'

'Yes; Château Thierry suits me in every way; 'tis at a convenient distance from Paris, twenty-four leagues; I shall keep an eye over Messieurs de Guise, who are half the year at Soissons. 'Tis at Château Thierry, then, that you will bring me the unknown beauty.'

'But, monseigneur, she will not, perhaps, allow herself to be brought.'

'Are you mad ? as du Bouchage accompanies me to Château Thierry, and she follows du Bouchage, matters, on the contrary, will proceed of themselves.'

'But she may wish to go another way, if she remarks that I have an inclination to conduct her to you.'

'It is not to me you will conduct her, but I repeat to you, 'tis to the count. Well, well ! But on my word of honour, one would think it was the first time you had aided me in such circumstances. Have you money ?'

'I have the two rouleaux of gold your highness gave me on leaving the camp of the polders.'

'Get forward, then; and by every method possible, you understand, bring me my fair stranger to Château Thierry; perhaps on observing her more closely, I shall recognise her.'

'And the valet also ?'

'Yes, if he does not inconvenience you.'

'But if he does inconvenience me?'

'Do with him as you would with a stone you encountered in your road; throw him in the ditch.'

'Good, monseigneur.'

Whilst the two conspirators arranged their plans in the shade, Henri ascended to the first landing and awoke Remy.

The latter apprised, knocked at the door in a certain manner, and almost immediately the young woman opened.

Behind Remy, she observed du Bouchage.

'Good evening, sir,' she said, with a smile, which her face had almost forgotten.

'Oh! pardon me, madame,' said the count directly, 'I do not come to importune you, I am come to make you my adieux.'

'Your adieux! you leave, Monsieur the Count?'

'For France; yes, madame.'

'And you leave us?'

'I am forced to, madame, my first duty being to obey the prince.'

'The prince; there is a prince here?' said Remy.

'What prince?' demanded Diana, turning pale.

'M. the Duke of Anjou, whom they supposed dead, and who is miraculously saved, has joined us.'

Diana uttered a terrifying cry, and Remy became so pale that he seemed as if struck with sudden death.

'Repeat to me,' stammered Diana, 'that the Duke of Anjou is living; that the Duke of Anjou is here.'

'If he were not, madame, and if he did not command me to follow him, I would have accompanied you to the convent in which, you have told me, you intend to retire.'

'Yes, yes,' said Remy, 'the convent, madame, the convent.'

And he placed a finger on his lips.

A move of the head told him that Diana had understood this sign.

'I would have accompanied you much the more willingly, madame,' continued Henri, 'as you may be incommoded by the prince's men.'

'How so?'

'Yes; all leads me to think that he is aware that a woman resides in this house; and he no doubt thinks that this woman is a friend of mine.'

'And from whence comes this belief?'

'Our young ensign saw him place a ladder against the wall, and look through this window.'

'Oh!' exclaimed Diana, 'my God! my God!'

'Reassure yourself, madame, he heard him say to his companion that he did not know you.'

'No matter, no matter,' said the young woman, regarding Remy.

'All that you desire, madame, all,' said Remy, arming his features with a supreme resolution.

'Do not alarm yourself, madame,' said Henri, 'the duke departs this very moment; a quarter of an hour more and you will be alone and free. Allow me then to salute you with respect, and to say to you once more, that until my last sigh, my heart will beat for you, and through you. Adieu! madame, adieu!'

And the count, bowing as religiously as he would before an altar, made two steps towards the door.

'No, no!' exclaimed Diana, with the wildness of fever; 'no! God has not willed that; no! God had killed this man; he cannot have resuscitated him; no, no, sir! you deceive yourself, he is dead.'

At this very moment, and as to reply to this painful invocation to the celestial mercy, the voice of the prince resounded in the street.

'Count,' it said, 'count, you keep us waiting.'

'You hear it, madame,' said Henri. 'A last time, adieu!'

And pressing the hand of Remy, he hastened downstairs.

Diana approached the window, trembling and convulsive as the bird fascinated by the serpent of the Antilles.

She perceived the duke on horseback; his face was coloured by the light of the torches held by two gendarmes.

'Oh! he lives, the demon, he lives!' murmured Diana in the ear of Remy, with so terrible an accent that the honest attendant was himself alarmed at it; 'he lives, let us live also; he leaves for France. So be it, Remy, 'tis to France we are going.'

CHAPTER LXXVII

SEDUCTION

THE preparations of the gendarmes for departing had thrown confusion into the hamlet; their departure was succeeded by the profoundest silence.

Remy allowed the late sound of arms and voices to die away by degrees, and at last to be extinguished; and, when he supposed the house entirely deserted, he descended into the lower room to busy himself about his own departure and that of Diana.

But on pushing the door of this room, he was much surprised at seeing a man seated near the fire, the face turned towards him.

This man evidently watched the departure of Remy, although, on perceiving him, he assumed an air of the most profound indifference.

Remy approached, as usual with him, with a slow and broken step, uncovering his bald head, and like an old man borne down by age.

The man towards whom he approached had the light behind him, so that Remy could not distinguish his features.

'Pardon, sir,' he said, 'I thought myself alone or nearly so, here.'

'And I also,' replied the other; 'but I see with pleasure that I shall have some companions.'

'Oh! very sorrowful companions, sir,' returned Remy; 'for with the exception of a young man, ill, whom I am conducting to France——'

'Ah!' said Aurilly suddenly, affecting all the good humour of a compassionating bourgeois, 'I know what you would say.'

'Really?' demanded Remy.

'Yes, you mean the young lady.'

'What young lady?' exclaimed Remy, on the defensive.

'There, there, don't be angry, my good friend,' replied Aurilly; 'I am the intendant of the house of Joyeuse; I have joined my young master by order of his brother; and at his departure the count recommended me a young lady, and an old servitor, who intend returning to France after following him to Flanders.'

The man thus spoke in approaching Remy with a smiling and affectionate look. He placed himself in this movement in the middle of the ray from the lamp, so that the light fell full upon him.

Remy could now see him.

But instead of advancing towards his interlocutor, Remy made a step backwards; and a sentiment approaching horror was painted for a moment on his mutilated visage.

'You do not reply; one would think I caused you fear,' said Aurilly, in his most smiling manner.

'Sir,' replied Remy, affecting a broken voice, 'pardon a poor old man, whom his misfortunes and wounds have rendered timid and mistrustful.'

'The more reason, my friend,' replied Aurilly, 'that you should accept the support and assistance of an honest companion; besides, as I told you just now, I come on the part of a master who ought to inspire you with confidence.'

'Assuredly, sir.'

And Remy again made a step backwards.

'You quit me.'

'I am going to consult my mistress; I can take nothing on myself, you comprehend.'

'Oh! 'tis natural; but allow me to present myself, I will explain to her the mission in all its details.'

'No, no, thank you; madame is still asleep, perhaps, and her sleep is sacred to me.'

'As you like. Besides, I have nothing more to say to you, except that which my master charged me to communicate to you.'

'To me?'

'To you and the young lady.'

'Your master the Count du Bouchage, eh?'

'Himself.'

'Thank you, sir.'

When he had closed the door, every appearance of the old man, except the bald front and wrinkled visage, disappeared instantly, and he mounted the staircase with such precipitation and so extraordinary a vigour, that we should not have given twenty-five years to this vieillard, who a moment before had appeared sixty.

'Madame! madame!' exclaimed Remy, in an agitated voice, the moment he perceived Diana.

'Well! what is it now, Remy; has the duke not departed?'

'Yes, madame; but there is here a demon a thousand times worse, a thousand times more to be feared, than him; a demon upon whom, every day for the last six years, I have called down the vengeance of heaven, as you did for his master, and this as you did whilst awaiting mine.'

'Aurilly, perhaps?' demanded Diana.

'Aurilly himself; the infamous wretch is there below;

forgotten, like a serpent out of his nest, by his infernal accomplice.'

'Forgotten! do you say, Remy? oh! you deceive yourself; you who know the duke, also know that he leaves not to chance the care of doing injury, when this injury could be done by himself; no! no! Remy, Au illy is not forgotten here, he is left here, and left for some design, believe me.'

'Oh! of him, madame, I will believe all you wish.'

'Does he know me?'

'I think not.'

'Did he recognise you?'

'Oh! me, madame,' replied Remy, with a bitter smile, 'they do not recognise me.'

'He has suspected me, perhaps?'

'No, for he asked to see you.'

'Remy, I tell you, that if he has not recognised me, he suspects me.'

'In that case, there is nothing more simple,' said Remy in a sombre mood, 'and I thank God for having so plainly traced our road; the village is deserted, the fellow is alone, as I am alone; I have seen a poniard at his belt—I have a cutlass at mine.'

'A moment, Remy, a moment,' said Diana; 'I do not dispute with you the life of this miserable; but before killing him, we must know what he would have with us, and if, in the situation we are in, there are no means of utilising the injury he would do us. How did he present himself to you, Remy?'

'As the intendant of M. du Bouchage, madame.'

'You see plainly that he lies, then; he had some interest in lying. Let us discover what he wants, concealing from him, in the meantime, our own intentions.'

'I will act as you desire me, madame.'

'For the moment, what does he demand?'

'To accompany you.'

'In what quality?'

'In the quality of intendant of the count.'

'Tell him that I accept.'

'Oh! madame.'

'Add, that I am on the point of passing into England, where I have relations, but that I hesitate, however; lie like himself; to vanquish, Remy, we must at least fight with equal arms.'

'But he will see you.'

'And my mask ? Besides, I suspect that he knows me Remy.'

'Then if he knows you, he lays a snare for you.'

'The means of avoiding it is to appear to fall into it.'

'Yet ?'

'Come, what do you fear ? do you know anything worse than death ?'

'No !'

'Well ! are you no 'longer decided to die for the accomplishment of our vow ?'

'Yes; but not to die without vengeance.'

'Remy, Remy,' said Diana, with the brilliant regard of a savage excitement, 'we will avenge ourselves; be tranquil; you of the valet; I of the master.'

'Well ! madame, be it so, 'tis an affair settled.'

'Go, my friend, go.'

And Remy descended, still hesitating. The brave young man had, at sight of Aurilly, felt, despite himself, that nervous shuddering, full of gloomy terror, that we experience at the sight of reptiles : he would kill, because he had fear.

But still, as by degrees he descended, resolution re-entered this soul so firmly tempered; and on opening the door he was resolved, in spite of the advice of Diana, to question Aurilly, to confound him, and if he found in him the wicked intentions he suspected, to poniard him on the spot.

It was thus that Remy understood diplomacy.

Aurilly awaited him with impatience; he had opened the window that he might keep in sight every issue.

Remy approached him with a settled resolution; so that his words were calm and gentle.

'Sir,' he said to him, 'my mistress cannot accept what you propose to her.'

'And why so ?'

'Because you are not the intendant of M. du Bouchage.' Aurilly turned pale.

'And who has told you this, sir ?' he demanded.

'Nothing more simple. M. du Bouchage quitted me in recommending to me the person I accompany; and M. du Bouchage, on quitting me, spoke not a word to me concerning you.'

'He did not see me until after he had quitted you.'

'Lies, sir, lies !'

Aurilly drew himself up; the aspect of Remy gave him every appearance of an old man.

'You assume a very singular tone, brave man,' he said, frowning. 'Take care, you are old, I am young; you are feeble, I am strong.'

Remy smiled, but made no reply.

'If I intended you harm, either to you or your mistress,' continued Aurilly, 'I should have but to raise my arm.'

'Oh ! oh !' said Remy, 'perhaps I am deceived, and that it is some good you intend us ?'

'Undoubtedly.'

'Explain to me what you desire then ?'

'My friend,' said Aurilly, 'I wish to make your fortune at a single blow, if you serve me.'

'And if I do not serve you ?'

'In that case, since you speak frankly to me, I will reply to you with the same frankness; in that case, I desire to kill you.'

'Kill me ! oh !' said Remy, with a gloomy remembrance.

'Yes, I have full powers for that.'

Remy breathed.

'But that I may serve you,' he said, 'I must at least know your projects.'

'Here they are; you have guessed right, my brave man; I do not belong to the Count du Bouchage.'

'And to whom then ?'

'To a very powerful seigneur.'

'Pay attention; you are going to lie again.'

'And why so ?'

'Above the house of Joveuse, I see not many houses.'

'Not even the house of France ?'

'Oh ! oh !' said Remy.

'And this is how it pays,' added Aurilly, sliding one of the rouleaux of gold of the Duke of Anjou into Remy's hand.

Remy started at the contact of his hand, and made a step backwards.

'You belong to the King,' he said, with a simplicity which would have done honour even to a man more artful than himself.

'No, but to his brother, the Duke of Anjou.'

'Oh ! very good, I am the very humble servant of the Duke.'

'Wonderful !'

'Well! what next?'

'How, what next?'

'Yes, what does monseigneur desire?'

'Monseigneur, my dear,' said Aurilly, approaching Remy, and attempting a second time to slide the rouleau into his hand, 'monseigneur is in love with your mistress.'

'He knows her then?'

'He has seen her.'

'He has seen her!' exclaimed Remy, whose contracted hand grasped the handle of his knife; 'and when did he see her?'

'This night.'

'Impossible, my mistress did not quit her room.'

'Well! exactly so; the prince acted like a veritable schoolboy, a proof that he is veritably in love.'

'How did he act? come, tell me.'

'He took a ladder and climbed to the balcony.'

'Oh!' said Remy, compressing the tumultuous beatings of his heart, 'oh! that is how he acted?'

'It appears she is very handsome,' added Aurilly.

'You have not seen her then?'

'No, but according to what monseigneur told me, I burn to see her, were it only to judge of the exaggeration that love brings to a sensible mind. And so 'tis agreed then, you are with us?'

And for the third time Aurilly attempted to make Remy accept the gold.

'Certainly, I am with you,' said Remy, repulsing the hand of Aurilly, 'but still I must know what my part is in the events you prepare.'

'Reply to me first; is the lady above the mistress of M. du Bouchage or of his brother?'

The blood rushed to Remy's face.

'Neither of one nor the other,' he said, with constraint; 'the lady above has no lover.'

'No lover! why, then, she is a king's morsel. A woman without a lover! morbleu, monseigneur, we have found the philosopher's stone.'

'Then,' resumed Remy, 'Monseigneur the Duke of Anjou is in love with my mistress.'

'Yes.'

'And what does he wish?'

'He wishes to have her at Château Thierry, where he is repairing by forced marches.'

'Upon my soul, 'tis a passion suddenly taken.'

'Tis thus the passions take hold of monseigneur.'

'I see in this but one inconvenience,' said Remy.

'Where?'

'Why, that my mistress is about to embark for England.'

'The devil! this is just where you can be useful to me; decide her.'

'For what?'

'To take the opposite route.'

'You do not know my mistress, sir; she is a woman who likes to have her way; besides it is not enough that she goes to France, instead of going to London. Once at Château Thierry, think you she will yield to the desires of the prince?'

'Why not?'

'She does not love the Duke of Anjou.'

'Bah! a prince of the blood is always loved.'

'But if Monseigneur the Duke of Anjou suspects that my mistress is in love with the Count du Bouchage, or the Duke de Joyeuse, what gave him the idea of carrying her off from the one she loves?'

'Good man,' said Aurilly, 'you have very trivial ideas, and we shall have a difficulty in coming to an understanding, as far as I can see; so that I will not argue; I have preferred mildness to violence; and now, if you force me to change my conduct, well! be it so, I will change it.'

'What will you do?'

'I have told you. I have full powers from the prince. I will kill you in some corner, and will carry off the lady.'

'And you think, with impunity?'

'I believe all my master tells me to believe. Well, will you decide your mistress to come to France?'

'I shall attempt to; but I can answer for nothing.'

'And when shall I have a reply?'

'The time to ascend and consult her.'

'Tis well; mount, I await you.'

'I obey, sir.'

'A last word, good man; you know that I hold in my hand your fortune and your life?'

'I know it.'

'That is sufficient, go; I will busy myself about the horses in the meanwhile.'

'Do not hasten yourself too much.'

'Bah ! I am sure of the reply, do princes ever find cruel ones ?'

'I thought it sometimes happened so.'

'Yes,' said Aurilly, 'but 'tis very rare; go.'

And whilst Remy again mounted, Aurilly, as if certain of the accomplishment of his hopes, really directed his steps towards the stable.

'Well !' demanded Diana, on perceiving Remy.

'Well ! madame, the duke has seen you.'

'And ——'

'And he loves you.'

'The duke has seen me : the duke loves me !' exclaimed Diana; 'why you are in a delirium, Remy ?'

'No; I tell you what he told me.'

'And who said this ?'

'That man ! that Aurilly ! that wretch !'

'But if he has seen me, he has recognised me then ?'

'If the duke had recognised you, do you believe Aurilly would present himself before you, and speak to you of love in the name of the prince ? No, the duke has not recognised you.'

'You are right, a thousand times right, Remy. So many events have passed during the last six years in that infernal spirit, that he has forgotten me. Let us follow this man, Remy.'

'Yes; but this man will recognise you.'

'Why do you suppose that he has a better memory than his master ?'

'Oh ! because his interest is to remember, whilst the interest of the prince is to forget; that the duke forgets the sinister debauché, the blind, the surfeited, the assassin of his loves, is conceivable. If he did not forget, how could he live ? but Aurilly will not have forgotten; if he sees your face, he will believe he sees an avenging spectre, and will denounce you.'

'Remy, I thought I told you I had a mask, I thought you told me you had a knife.'

'Tis true, madame,' said Remy, 'and I begin to think that God is in league with us to punish the wicked.'

And calling Aurilly from the top of the staircase :—

'Sir,' he said, 'sir.'

'Well !' demanded Aurilly.

'Well ! my mistress thanks M. the Count du Bouchage

for thus providing for her safety, and she accepts with gratitude your obliging offer.'

'Tis well, 'tis well,' said Aurilly, 'apprise her that the horses are ready.'

'Come, madame, come,' said Remy, offering her his arm.

Aurilly attended at the foot of the staircase, lantern in hand, eager as he was to see the features of the stranger.

'The devil!' he murmured, 'she has a mask. Oh! but between this and Château Thierry, the silk cords will be worn out—or cut.'

CHAPTER LXXVIII

THE JOURNEY

THEY put themselves *en route*. Aurilly affected with Remy a tone of the most perfect equality, and with Diana, the most respectful manners.

But it was easy for Remy to perceive that this respect was interested.

In fact, to hold the stirrup for a woman when she mounts her horse or dismounts, to watch over her every moment with solicitude, and never to allow to escape an opportunity of picking up her glove or fastening her cloak, this is the part of a lover, of a servant, or a busybody.

By touching her glove, Aurilly saw the hand; in fastening the cloak, he looked underneath the mask; by holding the stirrup, he provoked a chance which showed him the visage, which the prince, in his confused memory, had not recognised, but which he, Aurilly, with his clearer recollection, relied upon perfectly recognising.

But the musician had to play a forced part. Remy reclaimed his services with his companion, and showed some jealousy at the forwardness of Aurilly.

Diana herself, without appearing to suspect the grounds for this watchfulness, took the part of him whom Aurilly looked upon as an old servant, and was ready to ease him of a portion of his services; and she begged Aurilly to allow Remy to do by himself all that appertained to his duty.

Aurilly was reduced, during the long stages, to hope for shade and rain; during the halts, to wish for meals.

He was, however, deceived in his expectation; rain or sunshine did nothing, and the mask remained on the

visage; as to the meals, they were taken by the young woman in a separate chamber.

Aurilly comprehended that if he did not recognise, he was recognised; he endeavoured to spy through the locks, but the lady constantly turned her back to the door; he endeavoured to look through the windows, but he found in front of the windows thick curtains, or for want of curtains, the cloaks of the travellers.

Neither questions, nor attempts at corruption, succeeded with Remy; the servitor announced that such was the pleasure of his mistress, and consequently his own.

'But are these precautions adopted on my account alone?' inquired Aurilly.

'No, against every one.'

'But the Duke of Anjou saw her; she was not then masked.'

'Chance, pure chance,' replied Remy, 'and 'tis precisely because, despite herself, my mistress has been seen by the Duke of Anjou, that she takes these precautions, not to be again seen by any one.'

Days, however, rolled on, they approached the termination of their journey, and thanks to the precautions of Remy and his mistress, the curiosity of Aurilly had failed of success.

Already Picardy appeared in sight of the travellers.

Aurilly, who for the last three or four days had tried everything, readiness to oblige, sulkiness, trifling attentions, and almost violence, began to lose patience, and the evil instincts of his nature by degrees got the better of him.

It appeared as if he surmised, that under the veil of this woman was concealed a mortal secret.

One day, he remained a little in arrear with Remy, and renewed with him his attempts at seduction, which Remy repulsed as usual.

'But,' said Aurilly, 'I must certainly, some day or other, see your mistress.'

'No doubt,' said Remy, 'but that will be the day she chooses, and not the one you may choose.'

'Yet if I were to employ force,' said Aurilly.

A flash that he could not restrain, escaped from the eyes of Remy.

'Try!' he said.

Aurilly saw the flash, he comprehended how much

energy lived in him whom he took for an old man. He set up a laugh.

'What a fool I am,' he said, 'what matters it to me, who she is? she is really the same, is she not, that M. the Duke of Anjou has seen?'

'Certainly!'

'And whom he told me to bring to Château Thierry?'

'Yes.'

'Well! that is all I want; 'tis not I who am in love with her, 'tis monseigneur; and provided you do not attempt to fly or escape from me——'

'Have we the appearance of doing so?' said Remy.

'No.'

'We have so little the appearance, and 'tis so little our intention, that were you not here, we should continue our route to Château Thierry; if the duke is desirous of seeing us, we are also desirous of seeing the duke.'

'In that case, then,' said Aurilly, 'we are perfectly agreed.'

And as if anxious to assure himself of the real desire of Remy and his mistress not to change the route:—

'Would your mistress wish to stop here a few moments?' he said.

And he pointed to a sort of hostelry on the road.

'You know,' said Remy, 'that my mistress only rests in the towns.'

'I remember it, but I had not remarked it.'

'Tis thus.'

'Well! I, who have not made a vow, shall stop here a moment; continue your road, I will overtake you.'

And Aurilly indicated the road to Remy, dismounted from his horse, and approached the host, who came to meet him with great respect, and as if he knew him.

Remy rejoined Diana.

'What did he say to you?' said the young woman.

'He expressed his usual desire.'

'That of seeing me?'

'Yes.'

Diana smiled under her mask.

'Take care,' said Remy, 'he is furious.'

'He shall not see me, I am determined, and this is telling you that he can do nothing.'

'But when once at Château Thierry, must he not see you with unveiled features?'

'What matter, if the discovery arrives too late for them? Besides, the master has not recognised me.'

'No, but the valet will recognise you.'

'You see that to the present, neither my voice, nor my step has struck him.'

'No matter, madame,' said Remy, 'all these mysteries that have existed the last week for Aurilly, have not existed for the prince, they have not excited his curiosity, have not awakened his memory, whereas for a week past, Aurilly has searched, calculated, and compared; the sight of you will strike a memory alive to every point, he will recognise you, if he has not recognised you.'

At this moment they were interrupted by Aurilly, who had taken a cross road, and having followed without losing sight of them, appeared suddenly, in the hope of seizing a few words of their conversation.

The sudden silence that acknowledged his arrival, significantly proved to him that he intruded; he contented himself therefore with following in the rear, as he occasionally did.

From this moment, the project of Aurilly was determined upon.

He really suspected something, as Remy had said; but he suspected instinctively, for not a moment did his mind, wandering from conjecture to conjecture, fall upon the reality.

He could not explain why they concealed from him, with such obstinacy, the face which sooner or later he must see.

The better to lead his project to an end, he seemed from this moment to have completely renounced it, and showed himself the most agreeable and most joyous companion possible, during the rest of the day.

Remy did not observe this change without uneasiness.

They arrived at a town, and slept there as usual.

The next morning, under pretence that the stage was a long one, they started at daybreak.

At midday they stopped to allow the horses to rest.

At two o'clock they resumed, and proceeded until four o'clock.

A large forest showed itself in the distance; it was that of La Fere.

It had the sombre and mysterious aspect of our northern forests, but this aspect so imposing for southern natures,

to whom, above everything, are necessary the light of day and the heat of the sun, was powerless upon Remy and Diana, accustomed to the thick forests of Anjou and Sologne.

But they exchanged looks, as though they both comprehended that it was there that awaited them that event, which, from the moment of departure, soared above their heads.

They entered the forest.

It might be six o'clock in the evening.

In about half an hour's ride the day was in its decline.

A high wind whirled the leaves in the air, and drove them towards an immense pond, lost in the depths of the trees, like another Dead Sea, and which extended along the road that stretched itself before the travellers.

For two hours the rain, which fell in torrents, had soaked the clayey soil. Diana, quite sure of her horse, and also careless enough of her own safety, allowed her horse to proceed without supporting him; Aurilly rode on the right, Remy on her left.

Aurilly was on the border of the pond, Remy in the middle of the road.

No human creature appeared under the sombre arches of verdure, on the long bend of the road.

The forest appeared like one of those enchanted woods under whose shades nothing can live, except that at times were heard from its gloomy retreats the rank howling of the wolves, awaking at the approach of night.

On a sudden Diana felt that her saddle, fixed as usual by Aurilly, turned and slipped; she called Remy, who jumped from his horse, and approached her to tighten the saddle-girth.

At this moment Aurilly approached Diana, who was occupied, and with the end of his poniard cut the silk loop that retained the mask.

Before she had divined the movement, or carried her hand to her face, Aurilly lifted the mask and leant towards her, who, on her part, bent towards him.

The eyes of these two beings were bound in a terrible regard; none could say which was the palest or which was the most threatening.

Aurilly felt a cold sweat spread over his forehead, let fall the mask and the poniard, and struck his two hands with anguish, crying :—

'Heaven and earth ! The Lady of Monsoreau !'

'Tis a name you shall not repeat again,' exclaimed Remy, seizing Aurilly by his waist, and dragging him from his horse.

They both rolled to the ground.

Aurilly stretched out his hand to seize his poniard.

'No, Aurilly, no,' said Remy to him, leaning on him and pressing his knee on his breast, 'no, it must rest there.'

The last screen that seemed stretched over the memory of Aurilly appeared torn away.

'Le Haudoin !' he exclaimed, 'I am dead !'

'Tis not yet true,' said Remy, placing his left hand over the mouth of the miserable, who was struggling underneath him; but presently !'

And with his right hand he drew his knife from its sheath.

'Now, Aurilly,' he said, 'you are right, now you are really dead.'

And the steel disappeared in the throat of the musician, who uttered an inarticulate death-rattle.

Diana, with haggard eyes, half bent towards her saddle, leaning on the pommel, trembling, but merciless, had not turned her head from this terrible spectacle.

But when she saw the blood spout upwards from the blade, she fell backwards on her horse, as stiff as though she were a corpse.

Remy did not trouble himself about her at this terrible moment; he searched Aurilly, took from him the two rouleaux of gold, attached a stone to the neck of the body, and threw it into the pond.

The rain continued to flow in torrents.

'Efface, O, my God !' he said, 'efface the marks of Thy justice, for it has still other guilty ones to strike.'

He then washed his hands in the still and gloomy water, took in his arms Diana, still in a swoon, lifted her on her horse, and mounted his own, at the same time supporting his companion.

Aurilly's horse, terrified at the howlings of the wolves who were approaching as if the scene had called them, disappeared in the wood.

When Diana came to herself, the two travellers, without exchanging a single word, continued their road towards Château Thierry.

CHAPTER LXXIX

HOW KING HENRY THE THIRD DID NOT INVITE CRILLON TO BREAKFAST, AND HOW CHICOT INVITED HIMSELF

THE morning after the day on which the events we have narrated took place in the forest of La Fere, the King of France left his bath towards nine o'clock.

His valet de chambre, after rolling him in a covering of fine linen, and sponging him with two cloths of the thick Persian wadding which resembles the fleece of a lamb, the valet de chambre had given place to the hair-dressers who, in their turn, had given place to the perfumers and courtiers.

At length these last departed, the King had sent for his steward, telling him he should take something more than his usual jelly broth, seeing that he felt some appetite this morning.

This good news, spreading throughout the Louvre almost at the same moment, produced a very legitimate joy, and the savour of the meats began to ascend from the offices, when Crillon, colonel of the French guards, we may remember, entered the apartment of His Majesty to take his orders.

'Faith, my good Crillon,' said the King to him, 'watch as you like, this morning, over the safety of my person; but, for God's sake, do not force me to play the king; I am all joy and happiness to-day; it seems to me, I don't weigh an ounce, and that I shall fly away. I am hungry, Crillon, do you comprehend that, my friend?'

'I comprehend it the better,' replied the colonel of the guards, 'that I am very hungry myself.'

'Oh! you, Crillon,' said the King, laughing, 'you are always hungry.'

'Not always, sire; oh! no, your Majesty exaggerates; but three times a day. And your Majesty?'

'Oh, me! once a year, and also when I have received good news.'

'Harnibieu! it appears then that you have received good news, sire? so much the better, for it gets more and more rare, in my opinion.'

'Not the least, Crillon; but you know the proverb?'

'Oh! yes, "no news is good news." I have no faith

in proverbs, sire, and especially in this one; you have received nothing from Navarre ?'

'Nothing.'

'Nothing ?'

'Undoubtedly a proof that they are asleep there.'

'And from Flanders ?'

'Nothing.'

'Nothing ? a proof that they are fighting there. And from Paris ?'

'Nothing.'

'A proof that they are hatching plots there.'

'Or children, Crillon; talking of children, Crillon, I think I am going to have one.'

'You, sire !' exclaimed Crillon, at the height of amazement.

'Yes, the Queen has dreamt last night, that she was pregnant.'

'Well, sire !' said Crillon.

'Well ! what ?'

'It renders me as joyful as possible, to know that your Majesty was hungry at so early an hour. Adieu, sire.'

'Go, my good Crillon, go.'

'Harnibieu ! sire,' said Crillon, 'since your Majesty is so hungry, you may at least invite me to breakfast.'

'Why so, Crillon ?'

'Because they say your Majesty lives on the air of the times, which makes you so thin, seeing that the air is unwholesome, and that I should be enchanted to be enabled to say : "Harnibieu ! they are pure calumnies, and the King eats like the rest."'

'No, Crillon, no; on the contrary, let them believe what they think; it makes me blush to eat like a simple mortal before my subjects. So, Crillon, understand this well : a king should always rest poetical, and always show himself nobly. And here is an example.'

'I am listening, sire.'

'Do you remember King Alexander ?'

'What King Alexander ?'

'Alexander Magnus. Oh ! you do not know Latin, true. Well ! Alexander loved to bathe before his soldiers, because Alexander was handsome, well-made, and plump enough, which induced them to compare him to Apollo and even to Antinous.'

'Oh ! oh ! sire,' said Crillon, 'you would be devilish

wrong to do as he did, and to bathe before yours, for you are very thin, my poor sire.'

'Brave Crillon, go,' said Henri, tapping him on the shoulder; 'you are a very excellent brute, you do not flatter me; you are not a courtier, my old friend.'

'On which account you do not invite me to breakfast,' continued Crillon, laughing good-naturedly, and taking leave of the King more contented than discontented, for the tap on the shoulder had balanced the absent breakfast.

Crillon left, the table was immediately laid.

The royal steward surpassed himself; a certain partridge stew with a porridge of truffles and chestnuts, immediately attracted the attention of the King, whom some fine oysters had already tempted.

Thus the customary jelly broth, that faithful comforter of the King, was neglected; he stared in vain on his golden spoon; its beseeching eyes, as Theophilus would have said, obtained absolutely nothing from His Majesty.

The monarch commenced the attack on the partridge stew.

He was about his fourth spoonful, when a light step grazed the floor behind him, a chair creaked on its rollers, and a well-known voice demanded in a sharp tone :—

'A cover.'

The King turned round.

'Chicot !' he exclaimed.

'In person.'

And Chicot, resuming his habits that no absence could deprive him of, stretched himself in his chair; took a plate, a fork, and commenced on the dish of oysters, first moistening them with citron, by carrying off the largest and fattest, without adding a single word.

'You here, you returned !' said Henry.

'Chut !' signed Chicot to him with his hand, his mouth being full.

And he profited by this exclamation of the King, to draw towards him the partridges.

'Halt there, Chicot, that's my dish !' exclaimed the King, extending his hand to retain the stew.

Chicot fraternally divided with his prince, and restored him the moiety.

He then poured out some wine, passed from the stew to a tunny paste, from this to stuffed craw-fish, swallowed by way of a discharge, and on the top of all, the jelly broth; and heaving a long sigh,—

'I have no more appetite,' he said.

'By the mordieu ! I really hope so, Chicot.'

'Ah ! good day, my king, how are you ? I find you in a gayish sort of humour this morning ?'

'Do you think so, Chicot ?'

'Sweet little colours.'

'Hem !'

'Is it so ?'

'Parbleu !'

'Then I compliment you.'

'The fact is, I find myself very well disposed this morning.'

'So much the better, my king, so much the better.'

'Ah ça ! But your breakfast did not finish there, and there still remains a few little delicacies for you. Here are some cherries, preserved by the ladies of Montmartre.'

'They are too sweet.'

'Nuts stuffed with currants.'

'Fie ! they have left the pips in the currants.'

'You are not satisfied with anything.'

'Tis that, on my honour, everything degenerates, even cookery, and that they live worse and worse at court.'

'Do they live better at the court of the King of Navarre ?' inquired Henry, smiling.

'Eh ! eh ! I do not say no.'

'Then there have been some great changes there ?'

'Ah ! as to that, you cannot believe half enough, Henriquet.'

'Speak to me a little of your journey then ; it will amuse me.'

'Very willingly ; I only came for that. Where do you wish me to commence ?'

'At the beginning. How did you make the journey ?'

'Oh ! a real promenade.'

'You met with no disagreeables in your way ?'

'I made quite a fairy's transit.'

'No evil encounters ?'

'Come, come, would they allow themselves to look cross at an ambassador of his Most Christian Majesty ? You calumniate your subjects, my son.'

'I said that,' resumed the King, flattered at the tranquillity that reigned in his kingdom ; 'because having no official character, no even an apparent one, you might risk.'

'I tell you, Henriquet, that you have the most charming

kingdom in the world. Travellers are nourished there gratis; they feed them there from love to God; they walk on nothing but flowers; and as to the wheel-ruts, they are carpeted with velvet fringed with gold. 'Tis incredible, but so it is.'

'Then you are content, Chicot ?'

'Enchanted.'

'Yes, yes, my police is well managed.'

'Marvellous ! 'tis only justice to say so.'

'And the roads safe ?'

'As those of Paradise; you meet nothing but little angels, who pass singing the praises of the King.'

'Chicot, we are coming back to Virgil.'

'What part of Virgil ?'

'To the *Bucolics*. *A fortunatus nimium !*'

'Ah ! very good, and why this exception in favour of the peasants, my child ?'

'Alas ! because it is not the same in the towns.'

'The fact is, Henry, that the towns are a centre of corruption.'

'Judge of it; you make five hundred leagues without interruption.'

'I told you so, on rollers.'

'I only go to Vincennes, three quarters of a league.'

'Well ?'

'Well ! I was nearly assassinated on the road.'

'Ah ! bah !' said Chicot.

'I will narrate this to you, my friend; I am in train to have the affair printed in detail; without my Forty-Five, I was dead.'

'Really ! and where did the affair take place ?'

'You mean to ask where it ought to have taken place ?'

'Yes.'

'At Bel Esbat.'

'Near the convent of our friend Gorenflot ?'

'Exactly.'

'And how did our friend conduct himself in the circumstance ?'

'Wonderfully, as usual, Chicot; I know not whether on his part he had heard anything spoke of; but, instead of snoring, as all my lazy monks do at the present day, he was standing in his balcony, whilst the whole convent was in the road.'

'And he did nothing else ?'

'Who ?'

'Dom Modeste.'

'He gave me his benediction with a majesty that only belongs to him, Chicot.'

'And his monks ?'

'They cried, "Vive le roi," with all their lungs.'

'And you perceived nothing else ?'

'What else ?'

'That they carried a weapon of some sort under their cuirass ?'

'They were armed with all manner of weapons, Chicot; and 'tis in this I recognised the foresight of the worthy prior. I said to myself, this man knew all, and yet this man said nothing, demanded nothing; he did not come the next morning, like d'Epernon, search in all my pockets, saying to me, "Sire, for having saved the King."'

'Oh! as to that, he was incapable of it; besides his hands could not get into your pockets.'

'Chicot, no jesting on Dom Modeste, he is one of the greatest men that illustrate my reign; and I declare to you, that on the first opportunity, I will give him a bishopric.'

'And you will do well, my King.'

'Remark one thing, Chicot,' said the King, assuming his profound manner; 'when they issue from the ranks of the people, men of talent are complete; we gentlemen, you see, take in our blood certain virtues and certain vices, hereditary, which make us historical specialities. Thus the Valois are cunning and subtle, brave but idle. The Lorraines are ambitious and covetous, with some ideas, as of intrigue and movement; the Bourbons are sensual and circumspect, but without mind, without force, without resolution; look at Henry, for example. When nature, on the contrary, kneads from the clay a man born of nothing, she employs none but her finest earth; thus your Gorenflot is complete.'

'You think so ?'

'Yes, learned, modest, artful, and brave; she will make of him what she likes, a minister, a general, or a pope.'

'There! there! sire, stop,' said Chicot; 'if the brave man heard you, he would burst his skin, for he is very proud, although you call him the prior Dom Modeste.'

'You are jealous, Chicot !'

'God preserve me, jealousy ! Fie, the villainous passion.'

'Oh! 'tis that I am just, the nobleness of blood does not blind me, *stemmata quid faciunt!*'

'Bravo! and you said, my King, that you were nearly assassinated?'

'Yes.'

'By whom?'

'By the league, forsooth!'

'How is the league?'

'Still the same.'

'Which means better and better; it gets fat, Henriquet, it gets fat.'

'Oh, oh! the political bodies, who get fat too soon, are no longer in existence; 'tis as with children, Chicot.'

'And so you are content, my son.'

'Nearly so.'

'You find yourself in Paradise?'

'Yes, Chicot, this morning, and 'tis a great joy for me, I find you arrive in the midst of my joy, and I anticipate an increase of joy.'

'*Habemus consulem facetum*, as Cato said.'

'You bring good news, no doubt, my child?'

'I believe so truly.'

'And you keep me in suspense, dainty-mouthed, as you are.'

'Where would you wish me to commence, my King?'

'I have already told you, at the beginning, but you always diverge.'

'Must I begin from the moment of my departure?'

'No, the journey was excellent; you told me so, did you not?'

'You see plainly that I return to the beginning, I think.'

'Yes, let us have the arrival at Navarre.'

'I am with you.'

'What was Henry doing when you arrived?'

'Making love.'

'With Margot?'

'Oh! no.'

'That would have astonished me. He is still then unfaithful to his wife; the scelerat, unfaithful to a daughter of France. Luckily she returns it to him. And when you arrived, what was the name of Margot's rival?'

'Fosseuse.'

'A Montmorency. Come, 'tis not bad for this Bearnais

bear. They spoke here of a peasant girl, of a gardener's wife, of the wife of a bourgeois.'

'Oh ! all that is old.'

'And so Margot is deceived ?'

'As much as any woman can be.'

'And she is furious ?'

'Enraged.'

'And she avenges herself ?'

'I really believe so.'

Henry rubbed his hands with unparalleled joy.

'What does she mean to do ?' he exclaimed, laughing; 'is she going to move heaven and earth, throw Spain on Navarre, Artois and Flanders on Spain ? Is she going to call her little brother Henriquet, against her little husband Henriot; heim ?'

'It's possible.'

'You saw her ?'

'Yes.'

'And at the moment you quitted her what was she doing ?'

'Oh ! that you will never guess.'

'She was preparing to take another lover ?'

'She was preparing herself to become a midwife.'

'How ! what does that phrase signify, or rather that anti-French inversion ? It is equivocal, Chicot; beware of equivocation !'

'No, my King, no. Plague, we are a little too much of a grammarian to deal in equivokes, too delicate to talk nonsense, and too truth-telling to have ever wished to say midwife ! No, no, my King; 'twas really midwife that I said.'

'*Obstetrix* ?'

'*Obstetrix*, yes, my King; *Juno Lucina*, if you like it better.'

'Monsieur Chicot !'

'Oh ! roll your large eyes as much as you like; I tell you that your sister Margot was in train to make an accouchement when I left Nerac.'

'On her own account ?' exclaimed Henry, turning pale; 'Margot will have children ?'

'No, no, on her husband's account; you well know that the last Valois have not the prolific virtue; 'tis not like the Bourbons; plague !'

'So that Margot delivers women, in the verb active ?'

'All that there is of the most active.'

'Who does she deliver ?'

'Mademoiselle Fosseuse.'

'My faith, I can comprehend nothing,' said the King.

'Nor I neither,' said Chicot; 'but I did not engage to make you comprehend; I engaged to tell the facts, nothing more.'

'But it was perhaps very unwillingly that she consented to this humiliation ?'

'Certainly, there was a struggle; there was inferiority on one part or the other. Remember Hercules and Anteus, Jacob and the angel; well! your sister was less strong than Henry, that's all.'

'Mordieu! I am glad of it, really.'

'Wicked brother!'

'They must execrate each other then ?'

'I believe that at bottom they do not adore one another.'

'But in appearance ?'

'They are the best friends in the world, Henry.'

'Yes; but some fine morning there will come some new love that will embroil them altogether.'

'Well! this new love is come, Henry.'

'Bah!'

'Yes, honour; but shall I tell you the fear I have ?'

'Say.'

'I am afraid that this new love, instead of embroiling them, will reconcile them.'

'Then there is a new love ?'

'Eh! my God! yes.'

'Of the Bearnais ?'

'Of the Bearnais.'

'For whom ?'

'Wait then; you would know all, would you not ?'

'Yes, recount, Chicot, recount; you recount excellently.'

'Thank you, my son; then if you wish to know all, we must go back to the beginning.'

'Go back, but speak quick.'

'You wrote a ferocious letter to the Bearnais.'

'How do you know that ?'

'Forsooth! I read it.'

'What do you say to it ?'

'That if it was not delicate in terms, 'twas at least astute in language.'

'It must have embroiled them.'

'Yes, if Henry and Margot had been an ordinary couple, married bourgeois.'

'What do you mean?'

'I mean that the Bearnais is not a brute.'

'Oh!'

'And that he divined.'

'Divined what?'

'That you wished to embroil him with his wife.'

'That was clear.'

'Yes, but what was less so, was the object for which you wished to embroil them.'

'Ah! the devil, the object.'

'Yes, this damned Bearnais was led to believe that you had no other object in embroiling him with his wife, than that of not paying to your sister the dower you owe her.'

'Heuh, heuh!'

'My God, yes; see what this devil of a Bearnais has lodged in his mind.'

'Continue, Chicot, continue,' said the King, become sombre; 'well?'

'Well, scarcely had he guessed this, than he became what you are at this moment, sombre and melancholy.'

'Go on, Chicot, go on.'

'This now drew him from his distraction, and he almost forgot his love for Fosseuse.'

'Bah!'

'Tis as I tell you; he was then seized with this new love that I have mentioned.'

'Why this man is a Persian then, he is a Pagan, a Turk; he practises polygamy then? And what said Margot?'

'This time, my son, she will astonish you; Margot was overjoyed at it.'

'At the disaster of Fosseuse, I conceive that.'

'No, no; enchanted on her own account.'

'She has a taste then for the profession of midwife?'

'Ah! this time she will not be a midwife.'

'What will she be then?'

'She will be godmother, her husband has promised her; and the sugar plums are already sent out at the present moment.'

'In any case, 'tis not with her portion he has purchased them.'

'You think so, my King?'

'Undoubtedly, since I refuse him this portion. But what is the name of this new mistress?'

'Oh, she is a strong and handsome person, who wears a magnificent belt, and who is very capable of defending herself if she is attacked.'

'And did she defend herself?'

'Pardieu!'

'So that Henriot was repulsed with loss?'

'At first.'

'Ah, ah! and afterwards?'

'Henry was obstinate, he returned to the charge.'

'So that?'

'So that he took her.'

'How so?'

'By force.'

'By force?'

'Yes, with petards.'

'What the devil are you telling me, Chicot?'

'The truth.'

'Petards, and who is this beauty then whom they take with petards?'

'Tis Mademoiselle Cahors.'

'Mademoiselle Cahors?'

'Yes, a tall and handsome girl, my faith, who they said was as virginal as Peronne; who has one foot on the Lot, the other on the mountain, and whose tutor is, or rather was, M. de Vezin, a brave gentleman, one of your friends.'

'Mordieu!' exclaimed Henry, furious, 'my town, he has taken my town!'

'You comprehend, Henriquet; you would not give it to him after having promised it to him. It was natural he should decide upon taking it. But stay, here is a letter he charged me to deliver into your own hands.'

And Chicot, drawing a letter from his pocket, handed it to the King.

It was the one Henry had written after the taking of Cahors, and which finished with these words:—

'Quod mihi dixisti profuit multum. Cognosco meos devotos; nosce tuos. Chicotus cætera expediet.'

Which signified:—

'What you told me was very useful to me. I know my friends; know your own. Chicot will tell you the rest.'

CHAPTER LXXX

HOW, AFTER RECEIVING NEWS FROM THE SOUTH,
HENRY RECEIVES SOME FROM THE NORTH.

THE King, at the height of exasperation, could scarcely read the letter handed to him by Chicot.

Whilst he deciphered the Latin of the Béarnais, with impatient contractions that made the floor shake, Chicot, in front of a large Venetian mirror suspended above a sideboard of plate, admired his attitude, and the infinite graces which his person had taken under the military habit.

Infinite was the word, for never had Chicot appeared so grand; his head, a little bald, was surmounted with a conic helmet, like the German head-pieces so curiously chased at Treves or Mayence; and he was occupied for the moment in replacing over his buff coat, greased with sweat and the rubbing of the armour, a travelling demi-cuirass, which, in order to breakfast, he had placed on a buffet; in addition, whilst buckling on his cuirass, he made sound on the floor spurs more capable of disembowelling than spurring a horse.

'Oh! I am betrayed!' exclaimed Henry, when he had finished the letter; 'the Béarnais had a plan, and I did not suspect it.'

'My son,' replied Chicot, 'you know the proverb, "The stillest water is always the deepest."'

'Go to the devil, with your proverbs!'

Chicot advanced towards the door, as if to obey.

'No, stay.'

Chicot stopped.

'Cahors taken?' continued Henry.

'And in a good fashion too,' said Chicot.

'But he has generals then, engineers?'

'No, indeed,' said Chicot, 'the Béarnais is too poor; how could he pay them? No, he does all himself.'

'And—he fights,' said Henry, with a sort of disdain.

'To say that he entered into it at once and with enthusiasm, no, I could not dare, no; he resembles those men who try the water before they bathe; they moisten the ends of their fingers in a little sweat of bad augury, prepare their bosoms with a *mea culpa*, the front with a few philosophical reflections; this takes them the first

ten minutes that follow the first report of a cannon; after which he plunges his head in the action and swims through fire and molten lead, like a real salamander.'

'The devil !' said Henry, 'the devil !'

'And I assure you, Henry, that 'twas warm work there.'

The King rose hastily, and paced the room with long strides.

'This is a check for me,' he exclaimed, in terminating aloud his thought commenced to himself; 'they will laugh at it. I shall be lampooned, These rogues of Gascons are caustic, and I already hear them sharpening their teeth and their sneers to the horrible tune of their bagpipes. Mordieu ! Luckily I had the idea to send Francis the succour so much demanded ; Antwerp will compensate me for Cahors; the north will efface the faults of the south.'

'Amen,' said Chicot, delicately plunging, to finish his dessert, the ends of his fingers in the comfit boxes and fruit plates of the King.

At this moment the door was opened, and the usher announced :—

'M. the Count du Bouchage !'

'Oh !' exclaimed Henry, 'I told you true, Chicot, here is my news arrived. Come in, count, come in.'

The usher opened the door, and there was seen in the entrance underneath the half-raised tapestry, the young man just announced, like a full-length portrait by Holbein or Titian.

He advanced slowly, and bent his knee in the middle of the room.

'Still pale,' said the King to him, 'still gloomy. Come, friend, for a moment put on your Easter looks, and tell me not good news with a sorrowful face; speak quickly, du Bouchage, because I thirst for your recital. You come from Flanders, my son ?'

'Yes, sire.'

'And with speed, as it seems.'

'Sire, as speedily as a man can journey on the earth.'

'You are welcome. What has become of Antwerp ?'

'Antwerp belongs to the Prince of Orange, sire.'

'To the Prince of Orange ! what does that mean ?'

'To William, if you like it better.'

'Oh ça ! but my brother, did he not march upon Antwerp ?'

'Yes, sire, but now, 'tis no longer upon Antwerp he marches, 'tis upon Château Thierry.'

'He has quitted the army?'

'There is no longer an army, sire.'

'Oh!' said the King, his knees trembling, and himself falling back in his chair, 'but Joyeuse?'

'Sire, my brother, after having done prodigies with his marines, after having sustained the whole retreat, rallied the few men escaped from the disaster, and with them made an escort for M. the Duke of Anjou.'

'A defeat,' murmured the King.

And suddenly with a strange brilliancy in his eye;—

'Then Flanders is lost for my brother?'

'Absolutely, sire.'

'Without retrieve?'

'I fear it.'

The face of the King brightened up gradually, as if under the influence of some inward thought.

'That poor Francis,' he said smiling, 'he is unfortunate in crowns. He lost that of Navarre; he stretched his hand towards that of England; he has touched that of Flanders; we will engage, du Bouchage, that he will never reign; poor brother, he who so desired it.'

'Eh, my God! 'tis always so when we desire anything,' said Chicot in a solemn tone.

'And how many prisoners?' demanded the King.

'Two thousand, nearly.'

'How many dead?'

'At least as many; M. de Saint Aignan amongst the number.'

'How! he is dead, that poor Saint Aignan!'

'Drowned.'

'Drowned! How, you threw yourselves into the Scheld then?'

'No, sire; 'twas the Scheld that threw herself upon us.'

The count then gave the King an exact description of the battle and inundation. Henry listened to him from end to end, with a pause, a silence, and a physiognomy which did not want in majesty.

When the recital was finished he rose from the table, and knelt before the prie-Dieu of his oratory, made his orison; and a moment afterwards, returned with a visage perfectly calm and serene.

'There,' he said, 'I hope I take things like a king.'

A king supported by a Seigneur is really more than a man. Come, count, imitate me; and since your brother is saved like mine, thank God! well, let us decide a little.'

'I am at your orders, sire.'

'What do you demand as the reward of your services, du Bouchage? speak.'

'Sire,' said the young man, bending down his head, 'I have rendered no service.'

'I dispute it; but, at all events, your brother has rendered some.'

'Immense, sire.'

'He has saved the army, you say, or rather, the remains of the army?'

'There is not, in what remains of it, a single man who would not say to you that he owes his life to my brother.'

'Well! du Bouchage, it is my intention to extend my favours to both of you; and in this I shall imitate the all-powerful Seigneur who has protected you in so visible a manner, by making you both alike, that is rich, brave, and handsome; I shall likewise imitate the great politicians always so well inspired, whose custom it was to reward the messengers of bad news.'

'Come then,' said Chicot, 'I know examples of messengers being hung for having been the bearers of bad news.'

'It's possible,' said Henry majestically, 'but there was a senate that rewarded Varron with its thanks.'

'You cite republicans to me. Valois, Valois, misfortune renders you humble.'

'Come, du Bouchage, what do you choose? what do you desire?'

'Since your Majesty does me the honour to speak so affectionately to me, I shall take advantage of your benevolence; I am tired of life, sire, and yet I have a repugnance at abridging my life, for God forbids it; every subterfuge that a man of honour employs in such a case is a mortal sin; to die in battle, to starve himself, to neglect to swim when we cross a river, these are travesties of suicide in the midst of which God sees perfectly clear: for you know, sire, our most secret thoughts are known to Him; I therefore renounce dying before the period fixed by God, but the world fatigues me, and I shall retire from the world.'

'My friend,' said the King.

Chicot raised his head, and regarded with interest this young man, so handsome, so brave, so rich, and who, nevertheless, spoke in so despairing a tone.

'Sire,' continued the count, with the accent of resolution, 'all that has happened to me for some time fortifies me in this desire; I wish to throw myself in the arms of God, the Mighty Consoler of the afflicted, as He is at the same time the Sovereign Master of those who are happy on earth: deign, then, sire, to facilitate for me the means of entering promptly in the path of religion; for, as the prophet says, my heart is sick even unto death.'

Chicot, the man of raillery, interrupted for a moment the incessant play of his arms and physiognomy, to listen to this majestic grief that spoke so nobly, so sincerely, by the sweetest and most persuasive voice that God had ever given to youth and beauty.

His brilliant eye abated its fire, in reflecting the desolate regard of the brother of Joyeuse; his whole body lengthened and gave way from sympathy, with that profound discouragement which seemed, not to have unbent, but to have divided every fibre of the body of du Bouchage.

The King also had felt his heart melt upon hearing this painful request.

'Ah! I comprehend, friend,' he said; 'you would enter upon religion, but you still feel yourself a man, and you fear the trials?'

'I do not fear for the austerities, sire, but for the time they leave to indecision; no, no, it is not to mitigate the trials that will be imposed upon me; for I hope to withdraw none of the physical sufferings from the body, or from my mind moral privations; 'tis to take from both every pretext for returning to the past; 'tis, in fact, to raise upon the earth the gate that will for ever separate me from the world, and which, according to the usual ecclesiastical regulations, closes slowly like a hedge of thorns.'

'Poor boy,' said the King, who had followed the discourse of du Bouchage, scanning each of his words; 'poor boy, I think he would make a fine preacher; would he not, Chicot?'

Chicot made no reply. Du Bouchage continued:—

'You comprehend, sire, that 'tis in my own family the struggle will take place; that 'tis in my relations I shall find the strongest opposition. My brother the cardinal,

so good at the same time that he is so worldly, will find a thousand reasons to make me change my resolution; and if he does not succeed in persuading me, as I am sure, he will attack with material impossibilities, and will call in Rome, who places delays in every rank of orders; there your Majesty is all powerful; there, I shall recognise the strength of arm that your Majesty will kindly stretch over my head. You have asked me what I desire, sire, you have promised to satisfy my desire; my desire, you see, is wholly in God; obtain from Rome that my noviciate may be dispensed with.'

The King, from the reverie he was in, rose smiling, and taking the hand of the count:—

'I will do what you demand of me, my son,' he said to him; 'you would be with God, you are right, He is a better master than I am.'

'A very fine compliment you are making Him,' murmured Chicot between his moustache and his teeth.

'Well! be it so,' continued the King, 'you shall be ordained according to your wishes, dear count, I promise you as much.'

'And your Majesty will overwhelm me with joy,' exclaimed the young man, kissing the hand of Henry with as much delight as though he had been made duke, peer, or marshal of France. 'So the affair is settled.'

'On the word of a king, on the faith of a gentleman,' said Henry.

The figure of du Bouchage brightened up; something like a smile of ecstasy passed over his lips; he respectfully saluted the King and disappeared.

'There is a happy, a very happy young man!' exclaimed Henry.

'Good!' exclaimed Chicot, 'you have nothing to envy him, I think; he is not more lamentable than you, sire.'

'But, imagine, Chicot, imagine then; he will be a monk, he gives himself to Heaven.'

'And who the devil prevents your doing the same? He demands a dispensation from his brother the cardinal; but I know a cardinal who would give you every dispensation necessary. He is still on better terms than you with Rome; you do not know him? 'Tis the Cardinal de Guise.'

'Chicot!'

'And if the tonsure alarms you, for in fact 'tis a delicate operation that of being shaved; the prettiest hands in

the world, the prettiest scissors of the Rue de la Coutellerie, scissors of gold, my faith ! will give you this symbol, which will bear the figure 3, the number of crowns you have worn, and which will justify the device : "*Manet ultima celo.*"

'Pretty hands, you say ?'

'Well ! come, have you anything to say against the hands of Madame de Montpensier, after saying as much of her shoulders ? what a king you make, and what severity you show towards your subjects !'

The King frowned, and passed across his forehead a hand as white as those of which they were speaking, but assuredly more trembling.

'Come, come,' said Chicot, 'let us leave all this, for I see, moreover, that the conversation wearies you, and let us return to matters that personally interest me.'

The King made a gesture half indifferent, half approving.

Chicot looked round him, and rolling his chair on the two hind feet,—

'Come,' said he, quietly, 'reply my son, these Messieurs de Joyeuse departed *like that* for Flanders.'

'In the first place, what means your *like that* ?'

'It means that they are men so eager, the one after pleasure, the other for melancholy, that it appeared to me surprising that they quitted Paris without making a little noise; the one to amuse himself, the other to drown his thoughts.'

'Well ?'

'Well ! as you are one of their best friends, you ought to know how they departed.'

'Undoubtedly, I know it.'

'Then tell me, Henriquet, did you hear it said——'

Chicot stopped.

'What ?'

'That they beat some one of consequence for example ?'

'I have not heard a word of it.'

'Have they carried off some woman with effraction and pistols ?'

'Not that I know of.'

'Have they—burnt something, by chance ?'

'What ?'

'How do I know ? What they burn by way of amusement, when we are grand seigneurs; the house of a poor devil, for example ?'

'Are you mad, Chicot? Burn a house in my city of Paris; would they dare permit themselves to do such things?'

'Ah! yes, one gets bored.'

'Chicot!'

'In fact they have done nothing of which you have heard the noise or seen the smoke.'

'My faith! no.'

'So much the better,' said Chicot, breathing with a sort of facility he had not had, during the whole time of the interrogatory to which he had made Henry submit.

'Do you know one thing, Chicot?' said Henry.

'No, I do not know it.'

'Why, that you become wicked?'

'Me?'

'Yes, you.'

'The visit to the tomb sweetened me, great King, but your presence has soured me. *Omnia letho putrescunt.*'

'That means that I am mouldy,' said the King.

'A little, my son, a little.'

'You become insupportable, Chicot, and I attribute to you projects of intrigue and ambition, which I believed far from your character.'

'Projects of ambition, me! Chicot ambitious! Henriquet, my son, you were only simple, you become foolish, 'tis progress.'

'And I tell you, Monsieur Chicot, that you will drive from me all my servants, by supposing them to have intentions they do not possess; crimes of which they have never thought; I say that in fact you would monopolise me.'

'Monopolise you, me!' exclaimed Chicot; 'forestall you! what to do? God preserve me from it, you are too troublesome a being, *bone Deus!* without reckoning that you are as difficult to feed as the devil. Oh! no, no, for example.'

'Hum!' said the King.

'Well, explain to me whence you obtained this idea.'

'You commenced by listening coldly to my praises regarding your old friend, Dom Modeste, to whom you owe much.'

'Me! I owe much to Dom Modeste? Good, good, good, next?'

'Next, you have tried to calumniate the Joyeuses to me, two real friends, they are.'

'I do not deny it.'

'Afterwards, you launched your talons on the Guises.'

'Ah! you like them at present; you are in one of your days of loving every one, as it appears!'

'No, I do not love them; but as at this moment, they keep themselves close and quiet; as at this moment they do me not the slightest injury; as I lose not sight of them for a moment; as all that I remark in them is still the same coldness of marble; and as I am not in the habit of being frightened at statues, however menacing they may be, I hold with those whose face and attitude I know. You see, Chicot, a phantom, when it is become familiar, is no more than an insupportable companion. All these Guises, with their ferocious looks, and their long swords, are persons of my kingdom, who, up to the present, have done me the least injury; and they resemble, would you wish me to tell you what?'

'Speak, Henriquet, you will do me a pleasure; you well know you are full of subtleties in your comparisons.'

'Resemble those perches they leave in the ponds to give chase to the large fish, and prevent them from getting too fat; but suppose for a moment that the large fish do not fear them.'

'Well?'

'Their teeth are not quite strong enough to bite through their scales.'

'Oh! Henry, my child, how subtle you are!'

'Whilst your Bearnais——'

'Well, have you a comparison for the Bearnais?'

'Whilst your Bearnais mews like a cat, and bites like a dog.'

'On my life,' said Chicot, 'here is a Valois bedaubing a Guise. Come, come, my son, you are in too good a train to stop. Get divorced at once, and espouse Madame de Montpensier, you will at least have a chance with her; if you do not make children for her, she will make them for you; was she not in love with you once?'

Henry drew himself up.

'Yes, he said; 'but I was otherwise engaged; this is the source of all her threats; Chicot, you have hit upon it; she has against me the rancour of a woman, and she sets me on edge sometimes; but luckily I am a man, and I only laugh at it.'

Henry finished these words pulling up his collar,

turned down à la Byron, when the usher Nambu cried from the doorway :—

‘A messenger from M. the duke de Guise, for His Majesty.’

‘Is it a courier or a gentleman ?’ demanded the King.

‘Tis a captain, sire.’

‘By my faith, let him enter, and he shall be welcome.’

At the same moment a captain of gendarmes entered, dressed in the uniform of the country, and made the accustomed salutation.

CHAPTER LXXXI

THE TWO COMPANIONS

CHICOT, on this announcement, had again seated himself, and as usual with him, impertinently turned his back to the door; and his eye, half shut, plunged itself into one of those inward meditations which were so habitual with him, when the first words that the messenger from the Guises spoke made him start.

In consequence, he opened his eye.

Luckily, or unluckily, the King, occupied with the new-comer, paid no attention to this manifestation.

The messenger found himself placed about ten paces from the chair in which Chicot was squatted, and as the profile of Chicot scarcely rose above the trimming of the chair, the eye of Chicot saw the messenger entirely, whilst the messenger could only see the eye of Chicot.

‘You come from Lorraine ?’ said the King to the messenger, whose figure was somewhat noble and his mien warlike.

‘No, sire, but from Soissons, where M. the Duke, who has not quitted that town for a month, delivered me his letter, which I have the honour to lay at your Majesty’s feet.’

The eye of Chicot sparkled, and lost not a gesture of the new-comer, as his ears lost not a word.

The messenger opened his buff coat, fastened with silver agraffes; and drew from a leather pocket, lined with silk, placed next the heart, not one letter, but two letters; for one followed the other to which it was attached by the wax of the seal, so that, as the captain only drew out one, the other did not the less drop on the carpet.

The eye of Chicot followed this letter in its flight, as the eye of the cat follows the flight of the bird.

He saw also, at the unexpected fall of this letter, the colour spread over the cheeks of the messenger, his embarrassment in picking it up, so as to give the first to the King.

But Henry saw nothing. Henry, the model of confidence—it was his hour—paid no attention to anything. He only opened the one of the two letters offered to him, and read.

On his side, the messenger, seeing the King absorbed in his reading, was absorbed in the contemplation of the King, on whose visage he seemed to search the reflection of the thoughts which this interesting letter might produce in his mind.

‘Oh ! Master Borromée ! Master Borromée !’ murmured Chicot, following with his eyes every movement of the confidant of M. de Guise. ‘Oh ! you are captain, and you only give one letter to the King, when you have two in your pocket; wait, my darling, wait.’

‘Tis well ! ’tis well !’ said the King, again reading every line of the duke’s letter, with a visible satisfaction; ‘go, captain, go, and tell M. de Guise that I am grateful for the offer he makes me.’

‘Your Majesty does not honour me with a written reply?’ said the messenger.

‘No, I shall see him in a month or six weeks; consequently I shall thank him myself; go !’

The captain bowed and quitted the apartment.

‘You see, Chicot,’ now said the King to his companion, whom he still supposed buried in his arm-chair, ‘you see plainly, M. de Guise is innocent of all machinations. This brave duke knew the affair of Navarre; he fears that the Huguenots will get emboldened and raise their heads, for he has learnt that the Germans already determine to send a reinforcement to the King of Navarre. Now what does he do ? Guess what he does ?’

Chicot made no reply; Henry supposed he waited for an explanation.

‘Well !’ he continued, ‘he offers me the army he has just levied in Lorraine to watch the Flemish; and he apprises me, that in six weeks this army shall be wholly at my disposal, with his general. What do you say to that, Chicot ?’

Absolute silence on the part of the Gascon.

'Really, my dear Chicot,' continued the King, 'you are so absurd, my friend, that you are as obstinate as a Spanish mule; and if one has the misfortune to convince you of some error, which often happens, you sulk; eh! yes, you sulk, like a simpleton as you are.'

Not a breath arrived to contradict Henry in the opinion he had shown in so candid a manner as to his friend.

There was something that more displeased Henry than contradiction, this was silence.

'I think,' said he, 'that the rascal has had the impertinence to fall asleep. Chicot,' he continued, advancing towards the fauteuil, 'your King speaks to you, will you reply?'

But Chicot could not reply, seeing that he was not there. And Henry found the chair empty.

His eyes ran round the room; the Gascon was no more in the chamber than in the chair.

His helmet had disappeared like himself, and with himself.

The King was seized with a sort of superstitious shudder; at times it occurred to his mind that Chicot was a supernatural being, some diabolical incarnation—of a good sort, it is true, but certainly diabolical.

He called Nambu.

Nambu had nothing in common with Henry. He had a strong mind, as in general have those who guard the antechambers of kings. He believed in appearances and disappearances, he who had seen so many; but in appearances and disappearances of living beings, and not of spectres.

Nambu positively assured His Majesty, having seen Chicot leave five minutes before the messenger of the Duke of Guise had left.

But that he left with the lightness and precautions of a man, who did not wish to be seen leaving.

'Decidedly,' said Henry, passing to his oratory, 'Chicot is angry at being in the wrong. How sordid men are, my God! I say this for all, and even for the spirituel.'

Master Nambu was right; Chicot, covered with his helmet, and stiffened with his long sword, had traversed the antechambers without much noise; but with all the precaution he took, he could not prevent his spurs sounding on the steps which conducted him from the apartments to the postern of the Louvre; a noise that had made

many persons turn round, and had purchased Chicot many a salutation, for they knew the position of Chicot with the King, and many saluted Chicot more lowly than they would have saluted the Duke of Anjou.

In an angle of the postern, Chicot stopped as if to fasten his spur.

The captain of M. de Guise, as we have said, had quitted scarcely ten minutes after Chicot, to whom he had paid no attention. He had descended the steps, and had crossed the courts, proud and enchanted at the same time; proud, because taking all together he was not a bad-looking soldier, and took a pleasure in parading his graces before the Swiss and the guards of His Most Christian Majesty; enchanted, because His Majesty had received him in a manner to prove that he had no suspicion against M. de Guise. At the moment he crossed the postern of the Louvre, and was traversing the drawbridge, he was awakened by the clicking of spurs, which appeared like the echo of his own.

He turned round, thinking perhaps the King might have sent after him, and great was his stupefaction on recognising, under the turned up points of his helmet, the benign visage, and demure physiognomy, of the bourgeois Robert Briquet, his cursed acquaintance.

We may remember, that the first movement of these two men, respecting each other, had not been precisely a movement of sympathy.

Borromée opened his mouth half a foot square, as Rabelais says, and fancying he discovered that the man who followed him, was desirous of speaking with him, he slackened his pace, so that Chicot had joined him in two strides.

We know besides what sort of strides were those of Chicot.

'Corbœuf !' said Borromée.

'Ventre de biche !' exclaimed Chicot.

'My sweet bourgeois !'

'My reverend father !'

'With that helmet !'

'Under that buff coat !'

'Tis a marvel for me to see you !'

'Tis a satisfaction for me to join you !'

And the two proud ones regarded each other for some seconds, with the hostile hesitation of two cocks about to

fight, and which, to intimidate each other, rise up on their spurs.

Borromée was the first to pass from the serious to the mild.

The muscles of his visage unbent, and with an air of warlike frankness and amiable urbanity :—

‘Holy father !’ said he, ‘you are a cunning neighbour, Master Robert Briquet !’

‘Me, my reverend !’ replied Chicot, ‘on what grounds do you tell me this, I beg ?’

‘On the occasion of the convent of the Jacobins, where you made me believe you were only a simple bourgeois. You must indeed be ten times more cunning and more valiant than a lawyer and a captain together.’

Chicot felt that the compliment was made with the lips and not with the heart.

‘Ah ! ah !’ he replied in good humour. ‘And what must we say of you, Seigneur Borromée ?’

‘Of me ?’

‘Yes, of you !’

‘And why ?’

‘For making me believe that you were only a monk, you must indeed be ten times more cunning than the Pope himself; and, neighbour, I do not depreciate you in saying this, for the pope of the present day is a rough lighter of matches.’

‘Do you believe what you say ?’ demanded Borromée.

‘Ventre de biche !’ Do I ever lie, by chance ?’

‘Well ! touch that.’

And he offered his hand to Chicot.

‘Ah ! you greatly mistook me at the convent, brother captain,’ said Chicot.

‘I took you for a bourgeois, my master, and you know well the care we have for the bourgeois, we men of the sword.’

‘It’s true,’ said Chicot, laughing, ‘tis like the monks, and yet you have laid a snare for me.’

‘A snare ?’

‘Without doubt; for under this disguise you lay a snare. A brave captain like you does not exchange, without grave reasons, his cuirass for a frock ?’

‘With a soldier,’ said Borromée, ‘I shall have no secrets. Well, yes, I have certain personal interests in the convent of the Jacobins; but you ?’

‘And I also,’ said Chicot : ‘but chut !’

'Let us talk a little of all this, will you ?

'On my soul, I burn to do so.'

'Do you love good wine ?'

'Yes, when it is good.'

'Well ! I know a little cabaret without a rival, in my opinion, throughout Paris.'

'Eh ! I know one also,' said Chicot; 'how is yours called ?'

'The Horn of Abundance.'

'Ah ! ah !' said Chicot, starting.

'Well ! what is the matter then ?'

'Nothing.'

'Have you anything against this cabaret ?'

'No, on the contrary.'

'You know it ?'

'Not the least in the world, and I am surprised.'

'Does it please you that we walk there, neighbour ?'

'How then ! Immediately.'

'Come then.'

'Where is it ?'

'Near the gate Bourdelle. The host is an old connoisseur, and who knows perfectly how to appreciate the difference between the palate of a man like you, and the throat of a thirsty passenger.'

'Which means, that we can talk there at ease ?'

'In the cellar if you like.'

'And without being disturbed ?'

'We will close the doors.'

'Come,' said Chicot, 'I see that you are a man of resources, and as well known in the cabarets as in the convents.'

'Do you think I am in relation with the host ?'

'It has all the appearance of such to me.'

'My faith, no; and this time you are in error; Master Bonhommet sells me wine when I choose, and I pay him when I like—that's all.'

'Bonhommet,' said Chicot; 'on my word, that is a promising name.'

'And one that keeps its promise; come, neighbour, come.'

'Oh ! oh !' said Chicot to himself, following the false monk, 'tis here you must make a choice amongst the best grimaces, Master Chicot; for if Bonhommet recognises you at once, 'tis over with you, and you are nothing but a fool.'

CHAPTER LXXXII

THE HORN OF ABUNDANCE

THE road that Borromée made Chicot follow, without suspecting that Chicot knew it as well as himself, reminded our Gascon of the happy days of his youth.

In fact, how often, the head empty, the legs supple, the arms hanging down or swinging, as the popular slang says, how often had Chicot, under the ray of a winter's sun, or under the refreshing shade of summer, sought this house of the Horn of Abundance, towards which a stranger was now conducting him.

At that time a few pieces of gold or even of silver, sounding in his long purse, made him happier than a king; he allowed himself to enjoy the savoury happiness of idling, according to his good pleasure, he who had neither mistress, nor home, nor hungry infant at the door, nor parents, suspicious and scolding behind the window.

Chicot would then seat himself carelessly on the wooden bench or stool of the cabaret; he would wait for Gorenflot, who seldom turned up until the repast was about to be served.

And the eye of Gorenflot became animated, and Chicot, always intelligent, a constant observer, always an anatomist, studied every phase of his drunkenness, studying this curious nature, through the subtle vapour of a rational emotion; and under the influence of good wine, of warmth, and of liberty, youth ascended splendid, victorious, and full of consolations to his brain.

Chicot, on passing before the Bussy crossing, stood on his toes to endeavour to distinguish the house he had recommended to the cares of Remy, but the street was winding, and to stop would not have been good policy; he therefore followed Captain Borromée, with a short sigh.

Presently the great street of Saint Jacques appeared before him, then the convent of Saint Benoît, and nearly opposite the convent, the hostelry of the Horn of Abundance; of the Horn of Abundance, a little aged, a little dirty, somewhat creviced, but still shaded by the plane trees and chestnuts on the exterior, and furnished in the interior with its shining pewter pots, and its brilliant stew pans, which are the fictions of gold and silver for the drinkers and gourmands, but which attract really the

true gold and silver into the pockets of the cabaretier, from sympathetic grounds, the reason of which we must seek from nature.

Chicot, after having cast a rapid glance around him, made a large back, lost six inches in his height, which he had already diminished in presence of the captain; he added to it the grimace of a satire very different from the honest play of his physiognomy, and prepared himself to face the presence of his ancient host, Maître Bonhomet.

Besides, Borromée passed the first to show him the way, and at the sight of these two helmets, Master Bonhomet only gave himself the trouble to observe the one that walked first.

If the façade of the Horn of Abundance, was somewhat seamed, the façade of the worthy cabaretier, also, had suffered from the ravages of time.

Besides the wrinkles, which on the human visage correspond with the clefts which time imprints on the front of monuments, Maître Bonhomet had taken the fashion of a powerful man, who, to all but soldiers, rendered him difficult of approach, and which hardened, as we may say, his features.

But Bonhomet always respected the sword; it was his weakness; he had contracted this habit in a quarter far removed from all municipal surveillance, under the influence of the peaceable benedictions.

In fact, if a quarrel arose, unfortunately, in this glorious cabaret, before they could apprise the Swiss or the archers of the watch, the sword had already played, and played in such a fashion, as to make holes in many a doublet. This mischief had happened five or six times to Bonhomet, and had cost him a hundred livres each time; he therefore respected the sword after this system; fear brings respect.

As to the other customers of the Horn of Abundance, scholars, clerks, monks, and merchants, Bonhomet accommodated things by himself. He had acquired a certain celebrity from crowning with a large leaden bucket the reluctant or dishonest payers, and this execution always brought to his side certain pillars of the cabaret, whom he had chosen amongst the most vigorous men of the neighbouring shops.

Besides, the wine, which each had the option of fetching himself from the cellar, was known to be very pure and good; his forbearance respecting certain long credits

at the bar, was so well appreciated, that no one murmured at his fantastic humours.

These humours were, by some old customers, attributed to a deep chagrin which Maître Bonhomet had had in his domestic peace.

Such were, at least, the explanations which Borromée thought it his duty to give Chicot, as to the character of the host, whose hospitality they were about to appreciate together.

This misanthropy of Bonhomet had had a fatal result for the decoration and the comfort of the hostelry. In fact the host found himself, this was his idea at least, much above his customers, and paid no attention to the embellishment of the cabaret. The result was, that Chicot, on entering the common room, recognised it at once; nothing was changed, except the sooty complexion of the ceiling, which from gray had become black.

In those happy times, the taverns had not yet contracted that horrible odour, so acrid and so stale, of tobacco smoke, with which the wainscotings and draperies of rooms of the present day are impregnated; an odour that is absorbed and exhaled by anything that is porous and spongy.

The result was that, despite its venerable dirt, and its apparent sadness, the public room of the Horn of Abundance did not incommode by its exotic exhalations; the vinous miasmas profoundly crept into every atom of the establishment, so that, may we be allowed to say it, a real drinker found a pleasure in this temple of the god Bacchus, for he breathed in it the aroma and the incense dearest to this god.

Chicot passed behind Borromée, as we have said, and was not at all seen, or rather, not in the least recognised by the host of the Horn of Abundance.

He knew the most obscure corner of the public room, and as if he had known no other, he went and installed himself in it, when Borromée interrupting him,—

‘Very good, friend, but there is behind this partition a little nook, where two men can honestly converse in secret, after drinking, and even whilst they are drinking.’

‘Let us go there, then,’ said Chicot.

Borromée made a sign to our host, which meant :—

‘Neighbour, is the box free ?’

Bonhomet replied by another sign, which meant :—

'It is.'

'Come,' said Borromée.

And he conducted Chicot, who pretended to run against all the corners of the passage, into the little nook he had mentioned.

'There,' said Borromée, 'wait for me here, whilst I make use of a privilege accorded to the familiars of the establishment, and which you shall use yourself in your turn, when you are better known here.'

'Which?' demanded Chicot.

'Of going to the cellar, and choosing myself the wine we are about to drink.'

'Ah! ah!' said Chicot; 'a pretty privilege—go.'

Borromée left. Chicot followed him with his eye; and, directly the door was closed behind him, he raised from the wall an image of the assassination of Credit, killed by dishonest payers, which image was enclosed in a frame of black wood, and made a companion to another, representing a dozen poor wretches dragging the devil by his tail.

Behind this image there was a hole, and from this hole one could see into the large room without being seen.

This hole was well known to Chicot, for it was one of his making.

'Ah! ah!' said he, 'you lead me to a cabaret of which you are a familiar; you push me into a nook where you think I shall not be seen, and from which you think I cannot see, and in this nook there is a hole, thanks to which you will not make a gesture that I shall not see, Come, come, my captain, you are not strong.'

And Chicot, whilst pronouncing these words, with an air of contempt which only belonged to him, applied his eye to the partition, artistically bored through a defect in the wood.

Through this hole he observed Borromée, at first placing his fingers on his lips, and afterwards conversing with Bonhomet, who acquiesced in his wishes by a sign of the head.

By the movement of the lips of the captain, Chicot, very expert in such matters, guessed that the phrase pronounced by him meant:—

'Serve us in this nook, and whatever noise you hear, take no notice of it, and do not enter.'

After which Borromée took a lamp, which constantly burned on a stand, raised a trap-door, and descended

himself to the cellar, taking advantage of the most precious privilege accorded to the habitués of the establishment.

Chicot immediately knocked at the partition in a private manner.

On hearing this mode of knocking, which recalled to him some deep remembrance rooted in his heart, Bonhomet started, looked about him and listened.

Chicot knocked a second time, and like a man who is surprised that his first appeal is not attended to.

Bonhomet hastened to the little nook, and found Chicot standing up, and with a threatening countenance.

At this sight, Bonhomet uttered a cry; he supposed Chicot dead, as every one did, and fancied himself in presence of his phantom.

'What does this mean, my master?' said Chicot, 'and since when is it you have accustomed men of my stamp to call twice?'

'Oh! dear Monsieur Chicot,' said Bonhomet, 'is it you, or is it only your spectre?'

'Whether it is me or my spectre,' said Chicot, 'from the moment you recognise me, I hope you will obey me on all points.'

'Oh! certainly, dear seigneur; order.'

'Whatever noise you hear in this cabinet, Master Bonhomet, and whatever takes place here, I hope you will wait till I call you, before you enter it.'

'And this will be the easier for me, dear Monsieur Chicot, that the recommendation you give me is exactly the same as your companion has given me.'

'Yes; but it is not he who will call—understand well, Maître Bonhomet—it will be me: or if he calls, understand, it will be precisely as though he did not call.'

'Tis a matter agreed, Monsieur Chicot.'

'Good! and now remove all your customers under some excuse, and in ten minutes let us be as free and as isolated with you, as if we came to hold a fast on Good Friday.'

'In ten minutes, Seigneur Chicot, there shall not be a cat throughout the hotel, with the exception of your humble servant.'

'Go, Bonhomet, go, you have preserved all my esteem,' said Chicot majestically.

'Oh! my God! my God!' said Bonhomet retiring, 'what is going to take place then, in my poor house?'

And as he retired backwards, he encountered Borromée, who ascended from the cellar with twelve bottles.

'You have heard,' said the latter; 'in ten minutes let there not be a soul in the establishment.'

Bonhomet made, with his head, usually so disdainingly, a sign of obedience, and retired to his kitchen in order to dream of the means of obeying the double injunction of his two redoubtable friends.

Borromée re-entered the cabinet, and found Chicot, who awaited him, his leg in advance, and a smile on his lips.

We are not aware how Maître Bonhomet contrived; but the ten minutes elapsed, the last scholar crossed the threshold of the door, giving his arm to the last clerk, and saying,—

'Oh! oh! the weather is stormy with Maître Bonhomet; let us decamp, or beware the hail!'

CHAPTER LXXXIII

WHAT TOOK PLACE IN THE CABINET OF MAÎTRE BONHOMET

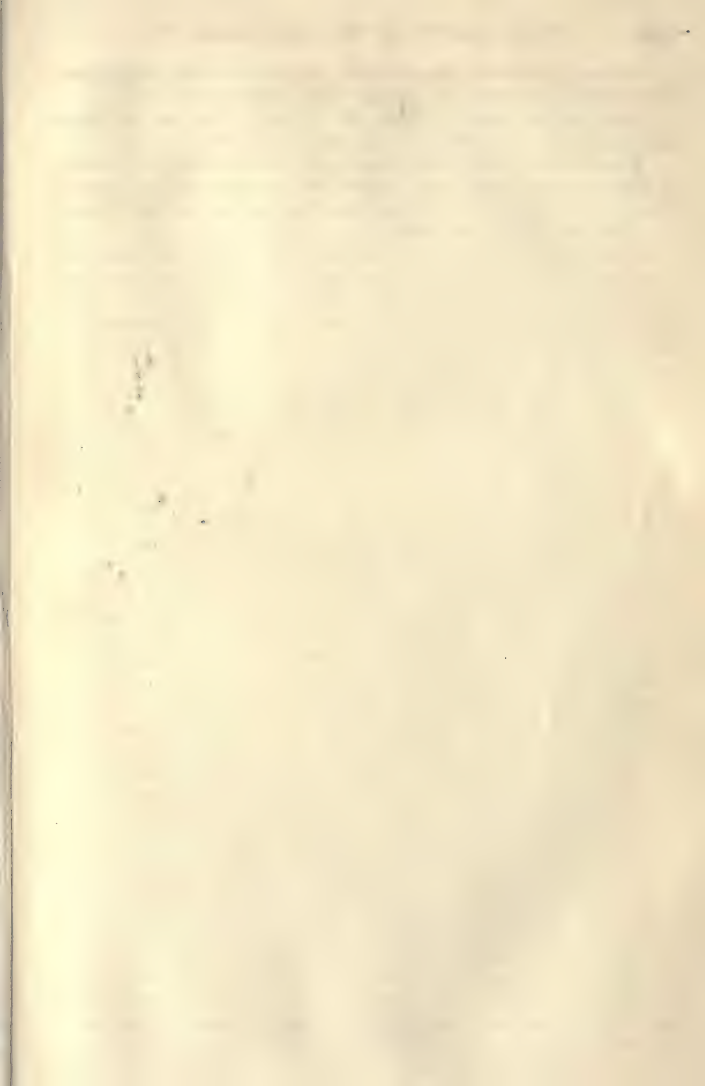
WHEN the captain re-entered the cabinet, with a basket of twelve bottles in his hand, Chicot received him with such an open and smiling air, that Borromée was tempted to take Chicot for a simpleton.

Borromée had hastened to uncork the bottles he had brought from the cave; but this was nothing in comparison with the haste of Chicot, so that the preparations were not long. The two companions, like experienced drinkers, asked for some little relishes, with the praiseworthy object of preventing the subsidence of thirst. This seasoning was brought them by Bonhomet, upon whom each of the two cast a last meaning look.

Bonhomet replied to each of them; but if any one had judged these two glances, he would have found a great difference between the one addressed to Chicot, and that addressed to Borromée.

Bonhomet retired, and the two companions commenced drinking.

At first, as if the occupation was too important for anything to interrupt it, the two drinkers swallowed a good number of bumpers without exchanging a single word.





F.G

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““No, Aurilly, no,” said Remy, pressing his knee on his breast.”

X

Chicot especially was marvellous, without having said anything, but——

‘By my faith, but this is rare burgundy.’

And——

‘On my soul, this is excellent ham!’

He had finished two bottles, that is a bottle at each phrase.

‘By God,’ murmured Borromée aside, ‘this is a singular chance I have had to fall across such a drunkard.’

At the third bottle, Chicot raised his eyes to heaven.

‘Really,’ he said, ‘we drink fast enough to intoxicate ourselves.’

‘Good! this sausage is so salt!’ said Borromée.

‘Ah! that pleases you,’ said Chicot; ‘let us continue, friend; I have a solid head.’

And each of them again finished his bottle.

The wine produced on the two companions a very different effect; it loosened the tongue of Chicot, and tied up that of Borromée.

‘Ah!’ murmured Chicot, ‘you are silent, friend, you mistrust yourself.’

‘Ah!’ said Borromée to himself, ‘you babble, you are getting drunk, then.’

‘How many bottles do you require, neighbour?’ inquired Borromée.

‘For what purpose?’ said Chicot.

‘To become gay.’

‘With four I have my account.’

‘And to get tipsy?’

‘Let us say six.’

‘And to get drunk?’

‘I must double it.’

‘Gascon,’ thought Borromée; ‘he stammers, and is only yet at the fourth. Then we have plenty of margin,’ said Borromée, drawing from the basket a fifth bottle for himself and a fifth for Chicot.

But Chicot remarked that of the five bottles ranged by the side of Borromée, some were half full, others three parts, none were empty.

This confirmed him in the idea that first occurred to him, that the captain had some evil intentions towards him.

He rose to take the fifth bottle which Borromée presented to him, and staggered a little on his legs.

'Good,' said he, 'did you feel it ?'

'What ?'

'A shock of an earthquake.'

'Bah !'

'Yes, ventre de biche, luckily the hostelry of the Horn of Abundance is solid, although built on a pivot.'

'How, it is built on a pivot ?' said Borromée.

'Yes, certainly, since it turns.'

'Very just,' said Borromée, emptying his glass to the last drop, 'I certainly felt the effect, but I did not imagine the cause.'

'Because you are not a Latinist,' said Chicot; 'because you have not read the treatise *de natura rerum*; if you had read it, you would know that there is no effect without a cause.'

'Well ! my dear brother,' said Borromée, 'for in fact you are a captain like myself, are you not ?'

'Captain, from the sole of my foot to the hair of my head,' replied Chicot.

'Well, my dear captain,' continued Borromée, 'tell me, since there is no effect without a cause, as you pretend, tell me what was the cause of your disguise ?'

'Of what disguise ?'

'Of the one you wore when you came to Dom Modeste ?'

'How was I disguised then ?'

'As a bourgeois.'

'Ah ! 'tis true.'

'Tell me this, and you will commence my philosophical education.'

'Willingly; but in your turn, you will tell me, eh, why you were disguised as a monk; confidence for confidence ?'

'Done,' said Borromée.

'Touch it,' said Chicot, and he presented his hand to the captain.

The latter planted his hand heavily in that of Chicot.

'In my turn,' said Chicot.

And he dropped his hand perpendicularly in that of Borromée.

'Good,' said Borromée.

'You wish to know then why I was disguised as a bourgeois ?' demanded Chicot, in a voice that grew thicker and thicker.

'Yes, that puzzles me.'

'And you will tell me all in your turn.'

'Word of honour, faith of a captain; besides, is it not agreed on?'

'It's true, I had forgotten. Well! 'tis quite simple.'

'Speak then.'

'And in two words you shall be in the secret.'

'I am listening.'

'I was a spy for the King.'

'How, you were a spy?'

'Yes.'

'You are then a spy by trade?'

'No, as an amateur.'

'What did you spy with Dom Modeste?'

'Everything. I spied Dom Modeste first, next brother Borromée, then the little Jacques, then the whole convent.'

'And what did you discover, my worthy friend?'

'I first discovered that Dom Modeste is a great beast.'

'You need not be very clever for that.'

'Pardon, pardon, for His Majesty Henry the Third, who is not a fool, regards him as the light of the church, and reckons upon making him a bishop.'

'Be it so. I have nothing to say against this promotion; I shall laugh enough on that day; and what did you discover besides?'

'I discovered that a certain brother Borromée was not a monk, but a captain.'

'Ah! really you discovered that?'

'At the first view.'

'What next?'

'I discovered that the little Jacques practised with the foils, until he might fence with the sword, and that he practised at a mark, as an introduction to practising at a man.'

'Ah! you discovered that,' said Borromée, frowning 'and what next did you discover?'

'Oh! give me some wine, or otherwise I shall remember nothing.'

'You will observe that you enter upon your sixth bottle,' said Borromée laughing.

'And therefore I am getting tipsy,' said Chicot; 'I do not pretend the contrary; are we come here then to discuss philosophy?'

'No, we are come here to drink.'

'Let us drink then!'

And Chicot filled his glass.

'Well !' demanded Borromée, when he had brought Chicot to reason, 'do you remember ?'

'What ?'

'What else you saw in the convent ?'

'Parbleu !' said Chicot.

'Well ! what did you see ?'

'I saw that the monks, instead of being gownsmen, were old soldiers, and instead of obeying Dom Modeste, they obeyed you. This is what I saw.'

'Ah ! really, but no doubt this was not all ?'

'No, but some wine, some wine, some wine, or my memory will escape me.'

And as Chicot's bottle was empty, he presented his glass to Borromée, who helped him from his own.'

Chicot emptied his glass without taking breath.

'Well ! do we remember ?' said Borromée.

'Do we remember ? I believe you.'

'What more did you see ?'

'I saw that there was a conspiracy.'

'A conspiracy,' said Borromée, turning pale.

'A conspiracy, yes,' replied Chicot.

'Against whom ?'

'Against the King.'

'With what object ?'

'With the object of carrying him off.'

'And when so ?'

'When he should return from Vincennes.'

'Thunder !'

'If you please ?'

'Nothing. Ah ! you saw that.'

'I saw it.'

'And you forewarned the King ?'

'Parbleu ! since I came for that.'

'Then it was you who were the cause of the coup failing.'

'It was I,' said Chicot.

'Massacre !' murmured Borromée between his teeth.

'You say ?' continued Chicot.

'I say that you have good eyes, friend.'

'Bah !' replied Chicot, stuttering; 'I have seen a good deal besides. Pass me one of your bottles, and I shall astonish you when I tell you what I have seen.' Borromée hastened to comply with Chicot's request.

'Well !' he said, 'astonish me.'

'First,' said he, 'I have seen M. de Mayenne wounded.'

'Bah !'

'A fine wonder, he was in my road. And then I saw the taking of Cahors.'

'How, the taking of Cahors ! you are come from Cahors then ?'

'Certainly. Ah ! captain, 'twas worth seeing, really ; and a brave fellow like you would have delighted in the spectacle.'

'Not a doubt of it ; you were then with the King of Navarre ?'

'Side by side, dear friend, as we are now.'

'And you quitted him ?'

'To announce the news to the King of France.'

'And you arrive from the Louvre ?'

'A quarter of an hour before you.'

'Then, as we have not quitted each other since that time, I do not ask you what you have seen since our encounter at the Louvre.'

'On the contrary, ask, ask, for on my word of honour, 'tis the most curious.'

'Say on, then.'

'Say, say,' repeated Chicot ; '*ventre de biche !* 'tis very easy to say, *say !*'

'Make an effort.'

'Another glass of wine to loosen my tongue—up to the brim, good. Well ! I saw, comrade, that on drawing the letter of his highness the Duke of Guise from your pocket, you let fall another.'

'Another ?' exclaimed Borromée, making a bound.

'Yes,' said Chicot, 'which is there.'

And after making two or three digressions with an unsteady hand, he placed the end of his finger on the buff coat of Borromée, on the very spot under which lay the letter.

Borromée started as if Chicot's finger had been a hot iron, and this hot iron had touched his bosom instead of touching his buff coat.

'Ah ! ah !' he said, 'there will be only one thing wanting.'

'To what ?'

'To all that you have seen.'

'And which ?'

'Why, that you should know to whom this letter is addressed.'

'Ah ! the grand wonder,' said Chicot, letting his two hands fall on the table ; 'it is addressed to Madame the Duchess of Montpensier.'

'Blood of Christ!' exclaimed Borromée; 'and you have said nothing of this to the King, I hope?'

'Not a word; but I shall—tell it him.'

'And when so?'

'When I shall have had a nap,' said Chicot.

And he allowed his head to fall on his two arms, as he had let fall his two arms on the table.

'Ah! you know that I have a letter for the duchess?' demanded the captain, in a choking voice.

'I know that,' coo'd Chicot, 'perfectly.'

'And if you could keep yourself on your legs you would run to the Louvre?'

'I would go to the Louvre.'

'And you would denounce me?'

'And I would denounce you.'

'So that it is not a jest?'

'What?'

'That as soon as your nap is over——'

'Well?'

'The King will know all?'

'Why, my dear friend,' resumed Chicot, raising his head, and regarding Borromée in a languishing manner, 'understand, then, you are a conspirator; I am a spy; I have so much per plot that I denounce. You weave a plot, I denounce you. We each follow our profession, nothing more. Good-night, captain.'

And saying these words, not only did Chicot resume his former position, but he also arranged himself in his seat, and on the table, in such a manner, that the forepart of his head being buried in his hands, and the hind part sheltered by his helmet, he only presented his back as a surface.

But also, this back released of its cuirass, placed on a chair, was pleasingly rounded.

'Ah!' said Borromée, fixing on his companion his fiery eye, 'ah! you will denounce me, dear friend?'

'As soon as I awake, dear friend; 'tis agreed,' said Chicot.

'But we must know if you will awake,' exclaimed Borromée, and at the same time he dealt a furious blow with his dagger on the back of his bottle companion, thinking to pierce him through and through, and nail him to the table.

But Borromée had not reckoned on the coat of mail borrowed by Chicot from the cabinet of arms of Dom Modeste.

The dagger broke like a glass against this honest coat of mail, to which for a second time Chicot was indebted for his life.

In addition, before the assassin could recover from his stupor, the right arm of Chicot, unbending like a spring, described a half circle, and struck with a fist weighing five hundred pounds the face of Borromée, who rolled, bloody and wounded, against the wall.

In a second Borromée was on his legs; in another second he had his sword in his hands.

These two seconds had sufficed for Chicot to put himself on defence, and unsheath his sword.

All the vapours of the wine had evaporated as if by enchantment; Chicot kept himself half thrown back on his left leg, his eye fixed, the wrist firm, and ready to receive his enemy.

The table, like a field of battle, on which were lying the empty bottles, lay between the two adversaries.

But the sight of the blood which ran from his nose to his face, and from his face to the ground, infuriated Borromée, and losing all prudence, he rushed on his enemy, approaching as near as the table would allow.

'Double brute!' said Chicot, 'you see plainly that decidedly it is you who are drunk, for, from one side to the other of the table you cannot reach me, whilst my arm is six inches longer than yours, and my sword six inches longer than yours. And for the proof—there.'

And Chicot, without even bending himself, stretched out his arm with the rapidity of lightning, and pierced Borromée in the middle of the forehead.

Borromée uttered a cry, more of rage than of pain, and as, altogether, he was excessively brave, he redoubled the fury of his attack.

Chicot, still on the other side of the table, took a chair and seated himself tranquilly.

'My God! how stupid these soldiers are!' he said, shrugging his shoulders, 'This one pretends he knows how to handle a sword, and the smallest bourgeois, if it was his good pleasure, would slay them off like flies. Well done! he is going to poke out one of my eyes now. Ah! you mount on the table; good! it only wanted that. But take care then, ass that you are, blows from the bottom to the top are terrible, and if I wished it, why, I would spit you like a lark.'

And he pricked him in the belly, as he had done in his forehead.

Borromée reddened with fury, and jumped down from the table.

'Well done again,' said Chicot; 'we are now on plain ground, and we can converse while fencing. Ah! captain, captain, we assassinate like that sometimes in our moment of forgetfulness, between two conspiracies.'

'I do for my cause what you do for yours,' said Borromée, brought back to serious ideas, and frightened, despite himself, at the sombre fire that shot from the eyes of Chicot.

'That is speaking,' said Chicot; 'and yet, friend, I see with pleasure that I am better than you. Ah! not bad.'

Borromée had just dealt Chicot a thrust which had grazed his bosom.

'Not bad, but I know the thrust; 'tis the one you showed to the little Jacques. I was saying, then, that I was worth more than you, friend, for I did not commence the struggle, whatever strong inclination I had to do so; and moreover, I allowed you to accomplish your project, by giving you every latitude; and now, even at this moment, I only parry, because I have an arrangement to propose to you.'

'Nothing!' exclaimed Borromée, exasperated at the tranquillity of Chicot; 'nothing!'

And he dealt him a thrust that would have pierced the Gascon through and through, if the latter had not made on his long legs a step that placed him beyond the reach of his adversary.

'I will still tell you this arrangement, that I may have nothing to reproach myself with.'

'Silence,' said Borromée, 'in pain, hold your tongue.'

'Listen,' said Chicot, 'tis my conscience. I have no thirst for your blood, do you comprehend? and would only kill you at the last extremity.'

'Why, kill then, kill, if you can,' exclaimed Borromée, exasperated.

'No; already once in my life I have killed a dealer in old iron, like yourself. I may say even another old iron dealer stronger than you. By God! you know him, he was also of the house of Guise, an advocate.'

'Ah! Nicolas David,' murmured Borromée, frightened at the precedent, and placing himself on the defensive.

'Exactly.'

'Ah! 'twas you who killed him?'

'Oh! my God! yes, with a pretty little thrust that I will show you, if you do not accept the arrangement.'

'Well! what is the arrangement? let us hear.'

'You shall pass from the service of the Duke de Guise to that of the King, without quitting, however, that of the Duke de Guise.'

'Which means that I shall make myself a spy like you?'

'No, there shall be a difference. Me they do not pay, but you they shall pay. You shall begin by showing me the letter of M. the Duke de Guise to Madame the Duchess of Montpensier; you shall let me take a copy, and I shall leave you at peace until a fresh occasion. Heim! am I generous?'

'Stay,' said Borromée, 'here is my reply.'

The reply of Borromée was a cut at the armour, so rapidly executed, that the point of his sword touched the shoulder of Chicot.

'Come, come,' said Chicot, 'I see well that I must absolutely show you the thrust of Nicolas David; 'tis a simple and pretty thrust.'

And Chicot, who until now had kept himself on the defensive, made a step in advance, and attacked in his turn.

'Here is the coup,' said Chicot, 'I make a feint in *quarte basse*.'

And he made his feint. Borromée parried by breaking; but after this first step in retreat, he was forced to stop, the partition being behind him.

'Good! that's it, you box the compass; 'tis wrong, for my wrist is better than yours. I put up the sword then, I return to the *tierce haute*,¹ I bend myself, and you are touched, or rather you are dead.'

In fact the coup had followed or rather accompanied the demonstration, and the fine rapier, penetrating the bosom of Borromée, had glided like a needle between two ribs, and pierced to some depth, and with a dead sound, the deal partition.

Borromée stretched out his arms, and dropped his sword; his eyes were dilated with blood; his mouth opened, a red froth appeared on his lips; his head fell on his shoulder, with a sigh that resembled a death-rattle; his limbs now refused to support him, and his

¹ Long sword or rapier.

body, sinking down, enlarged the wound of the rapier, but could not detach it from the partition, maintained as it was against the partition by the infernal wrist of Chicot, so that the unhappy man, like a gigantic butterfly, remained nailed to the wall which his feet beat against with noisy kicks.

Chicot, cold and impassible, as usual with him in extreme circumstances, especially when he had at the bottom of his heart the conviction that he had done all that his conscience required him to do; Chicot left the sword which remained planted horizontally, undid the belt of the captain, searched in his doublet, took the letter, and read the address—*Duchesse de Montpensier*.

The blood, however, filtered in bubbling streams from the wound, and the agony of suffering was visible on the pallid features of the wounded man.

‘I am dying,’ he murmured, ‘I am expiring; my Lord God have pity on me!’

This last appeal to the divine mercy, made by a man who, no doubt, had never thought of it but at this supreme moment, touched Chicot.

‘Be charitable,’ he said, ‘and since this man must die, let him at least die as tranquilly as possible.’

And he approached the partition, he withdrew, with an effort, the sword from the wall, and supporting the body of Borromée, he prevented it from falling heavily on the ground.

But this last precaution was useless. Death had hastened rapid and icy, it had already paralysed the limbs of the vanquished, his legs bent under him, he slid from the arms of Chicot, and rolled heavily on the floor.

This shock made a stream of black blood to spout from the wound, with which fled the remains of life that still animated Borromée.

Chicot now opened the door of communication, and called Bonhommet.

He did not call twice; the host had listened at the door, and had successively heard the noise of the tables, of the stools, the clashing of swords, and the fall of a heavy body; now this worthy M. Bonhommet had, especially after the confidence that had been placed in him, too much experience of the character of men of the sword in general, and of that of Chicot in particular, not to guess from end to end what was taking place.

The only thing he was ignorant of, was which of the two adversaries had succumbed.

It must be said to the praise of M. Bonhommet, his countenance assumed an expression of real joy, when he heard the voice of Chicot, and saw that it was the Gascon who, safe and sound, opened the door.

Chicot, whom nothing escaped, remarked this expression, and felt himself inwardly pleased at it.

Bonhommet entered trembling into the small room.

'Ah ! good Jesus !' he exclaimed, on seeing the body of the captain bathed in its blood.

'Eh ! my God ! yes, my poor Bonhommet,' said Chicot, 'you see what we are; this dear captain is very ill, as you see.'

'Oh ! my good Monsieur Chicot, my good Monsieur Chicot !' exclaimed Bonhommet, ready to faint.

'Well ! what ?' demanded Chicot.

'That it is bad of you to have chosen my cabaret for this execution, such a handsome captain.'

'Would you rather see Chicot on the ground than Borromée ?'

'No, no !' exclaimed the host, from the bottom of his heart.

'Well ! 'tis what would have happened, however, without a special miracle of Providence.'

'Really ?'

'On the faith of Chicot ! look a little on my back, it pains me considerably, dear friend.'

And he stooped towards the cabaretier, for his two shoulders to come on a level with his eye.

Between the two shoulders the doublet was pierced, and a spot of blood, round, and as large as a silver crown, reddened the edges of the hole.

'Blood !' exclaimed Bonhommet, 'blood, ah ! you are wounded.'

'Stay ! stay !'

And Chicot took off his doublet, and then his shirt.

'Look now,' said he.

'Ah ! you had a cuirass; ah, how lucky, dear Monsieur Chicot; and you say that the scélérat attempted to assassinate you !'

'Damn ! it appears to me that it was not I who amused myself in giving myself a thrust with a poniard between the two shoulders. Now, what do you see ?'

‘A coat of mail broken.’

‘He went for good play good pay, that dear captain; and blood?’

‘Yes, much blood under the cuirass.’

‘Let us take off the cuirass, then,’ said Chicot.

Chicot took off his cuirass, and exposed to view a back that seemed composed of bone, of muscles glued to the bone, and of skin glued to the muscles.

‘Oh! Monsieur Chicot,’ exclaimed Bonhomet, ‘tis as large as a plate.’

‘Yes, just so, the blood is extravasated; there is an ecchymosis, as the doctors say; give me some white linen, pour out in a glass equal parts of olive oil and the dregs of wine, and wash the spot for me, my friend, wash.’

‘But this body, dear Monsieur Chicot, this body, what shall I do with it?’

‘That is no business of yours.’

‘How, this is no business of mine?’

‘No, give me also pens and paper.’

‘On the very instant, Monsieur Chicot.’

Bonhomet hastened out of the apartment.

In the meantime, Chicot, who probably had no time to lose, heated at a lamp the point of a small knife, and cut in the middle of the wax, the silk of the seal of the letter.

After which, nothing more retaining the despatch, Chicot drew it from its envelope, and read it with evident marks of satisfaction.

As he completed the reading of the letter, Maître Bonhomet re-entered with oil, wine, pens, ink, and paper.

Chicot arranged the pens, ink, and paper before him, seated himself at the table, and tendered his back to Bonhomet with the phlegm of a stoic.

Bonhomet understood the pantomime, and commenced his friction.

Yet as if, instead of irritating a painful wound, they were voluptuously tickling him, Chicot during this time copied the letter of the Duke de Guise to his sister, and made his commentaries on each word.

The letter was thus conceived,—

‘DEAR SISTER,—The expedition to Antwerp has succeeded for every one, but has failed for us; you will hear that the Duke of Anjou is dead; believe not a word of it.

‘*He lives*, do you understand, here is the whole question.

'There is a whole dynasty in these two words; these two words separate the house of Lorraine from the throne of France, better than the deepest abyss would do.

'But do not disturb yourself too much for this. I have discovered that two persons, whom I supposed dead, still exist, and there is a great chance of death for the prince in the life of these two persons.

'Think only of Paris; in six weeks it will be time for the league to act; let our leaguers know then that the moment approaches, and hold themselves in readiness.

'The army is on foot; we reckon twelve thousand men, sure and well equipped; I shall enter with it into France, under pretence of combating the German Huguenots who will lend assistance to Henry of Navarre; I shall beat the Huguenots, and entering France as a friend, I shall act as a master.'

'Eh ! eh !' said Chicot.

'I hurt you, dear sir ?' said Bonhomet, suspending his functions.

'Yes, my brave.'

'I will rub more gently, be easy.'

Chicot continued :—

'PS.—I entirely approve your plan respecting the Forty-Five; only permit me to tell you, dear sister, that you do these rogues more honour than they deserve——'

'Ah ! the devil !' murmured Chicot, 'this is rather obscure.'

And he again read,—

'“I approve entirely your plan with regard to the Forty-Five.”'

'What plan ?' asked Chicot of himself.

'“Only permit me to tell you, dear sister, that you will do these rogues more honour than they deserve.”'

'What honour ?'

Chicot resumed,—

'“Than they deserve.

“Your affectionate brother,

“H. DE LORRAINE.”'

'At length,' said Chicot, 'all is clear, except the postscript. Good, we shall look after the postscript.'

'Dear Monsieur Chicot,' Bonhomet ventured to say, seeing that Chicot ceased writing, if not thinking, 'dear

Monsieur Chicot, you have not told me what I am to do with this body.'

'Tis a very simple matter.'

'For you, who are full of imagination; but for me?'

'Well! suppose for example that this unfortunate captain had got into a quarrel in the street with the Swiss, or old troopers, and they had brought you the wounded, would you have refused to receive it?'

'No, certainly, unless you had forbidden it, dear Monsieur Chicot.'

'Suppose that, deposited in a corner, it had, despite the attentions you paid it, passed from life to death in your hands. It would be a misfortune, that's all, eh?'

'Certainly.'

'And instead of incurring reproaches, you would merit praises for your humanity. Suppose further, that in dying this poor captain had pronounced the name, well known to you, of the prior of the Jacobins, Saint Antoine.'

'Of Dom Modeste Gorenflot?' exclaimed Bonhomet, with surprise.

'Yes, of Dom Modeste Gorenflot. Well! you will apprise Dom Modeste; Dom Modeste hastens to arrive, and as they find in the pockets of the dead his purse—you understand, it is important that they find his purse. I tell you this in the way of advice; and as they find in one of the pockets of the dead, his purse, and in the other this letter, they will conceive no suspicion.'

'I understand, dear Monsieur Chicot.'

'There is more, you receive a recompense instead of undergoing punishment.'

'You are a great man, dear Monsieur Chicot; I run to the priory of Saint Antoine.'

'Wait then; the devil! I said the purse and the letter.'

'Ah! yes; and the letter, you hold it?'

'Exactly.'

'It must not be said that it has been read and copied?'

'Pardieu! 'tis just for this letter arriving intact, that you will receive a recompense.'

'There is a secret, then, in this letter?'

'There are, in the present times, secrets in everything; my dear Bonhomet.'

And Chicot, after this sententious reply, attached the silk to the wax of the seal, by employing the same means; he then united the wax so artistically, that the most prac-

tised eye could not have discovered the slightest fissure. After which, he replaced the letter in the pocket of the dead body, had applied to his wound the linen impregnated with oil and wine in the shape of a plaster, put on the defensive coat of mail next his skin, his shirt over his coat of mail, his doublet over his shirt, picked up his sword, cleaned it, replaced it in the sheath, and retired.

But returning,—

‘After all,’ he said, ‘if the fable I have invented does not appear good to you, there remains for you to accuse the captain of having himself passed the sword through his body.’

‘A suicide?’

‘That will compromise no one—you understand.’

‘But they will not inter this unfortunate in holy ground.’

‘Peuh!’ said Chicot, ‘is that a great pleasure for him?’

‘Why, yes, I think.’

‘Then do as for yourself, my dear Bonhomet, adieu.’

Then returning a second time,—

‘A propos,’ he said, ‘I will pay, as he is dead.’

And Chicot threw three gold crowns on the table.

After which he placed his forefinger on his lip as a sign of silence, and departed.

CHAPTER LXXXIV

THE HUSBAND AND THE LOVER

It was not without a powerful emotion that Chicot again beheld the Rue des Augustins, so calm and so deserted, the angle formed by the batch of houses that preceded his own, at length, that dear house itself, with its triangular roof, its worm-eaten balcony, and its gutters ornamented with water spouts.

He had such a fear of finding nothing but a void in the place of this house; he had so strongly expected to see the house bronzed by the smoke of a fire, that street and house appeared to him as prodigies of neatness, grace, beauty, and splendour.

Chicot had hidden in the hollow of a stone serving as a base to one of the columns of his balcony, the key of his cherished house. In those times the key of a coffer or piece of furniture equalled in weight and volume the

largest keys of our present houses; the keys of houses therefore were, according to natural proportions, equal to the keys of modern towns.

Chicot, then, had calculated the difficulty his pocket would have in containing the beloved key, and had determined upon hiding it as we have mentioned.

Chicot therefore, we must confess, had experienced a slight shudder in plunging his fingers in the stone; this shudder was followed by unparalleled joy when he felt the chillness of the iron.

The key was really in the place where Chicot had left it.

It was the same with the furniture of the first chamber, with the plank nailed over the beam, and, lastly, with the thousand crowns still slumbering in their oaken hiding place.

Chicot was not a miser; quite the contrary; frequently even he had thrown away his gold by handfuls, thus sacrificing the material to the triumph of the ideal, which is the philosophy of every man of a certain value; but when the idea had momentarily ceased to command the matter, that is, when there was no want of money, of sacrifice: when, in a word, the sensual intermittance reigned in the soul of Chicot, and when this soul permitted the body to live and enjoy itself—gold, that first, that incessant, that eternal source of animal enjoyments, resumed its value in the eyes of our philosopher, and none knew better than himself into how many savoury parcels that inestimable whole yclept a crown, subdivides itself.

‘*Ventre de biche!*’ murmured Chicot, crouped in the middle of his chamber, his flagstone opened, his plank by his side, and his treasure under his eyes; ‘*ventre de biche!* I have there a very kind neighbour, worthy young man, who has made respected, and has respected himself, my money; really it is an action inappreciable in the present times. *Mordieu!* I owe some thanks to this brave man, and to-night he shall have them.’

And thereupon Chicot replaced the plank on the beam, the flagstone on the plank, approached the window, and looked opposite.

The house had still that gray and sombre tint, which imagination lends, like a natural coloured complexion, to edifices of which we know the character.

‘It cannot yet be the hour of sleep,’ said Chicot, and besides these people, I am sure, are not very sound sleepers; let us see.’

He descended, and preparing all the gracefulness of his smiling face, knocked at the door.

He noticed the noise of the staircase, the creaking of an active step, and yet waited so long that he thought himself obliged to knock again.

At this fresh appeal the door opened, and a man appeared in the shade.

'Thank you, and good evening,' said Chicot extending his hand, 'you see I am returned, and come to offer you my thanks, my dear neighbour.'

'Sir?' said a disappointed voice, the accent of which much surprised Chicot.

At the same time the man who had opened the door drew back a step.

'Stay, I am mistaken,' said Chicot, 'it is not you who were my neighbour at the moment of my departure, and yet, God pardon me, I know you.'

'And I also,' said the young man.

'You are Monsieur the Viscount Ernauton de Carmainges.'

'And you are the Ghost.'

'Really,' said Chicot, 'I fall from the clouds.'

'Well, what do you desire, sir?' demanded the young man with a little sharpness.

'Pardon, I disturb you, perhaps, my dear sir?'

'No, only you will allow me to ask, eh? what I can do for you?'

'Nothing, except that I wish to speak with the master of the house.'

'Speak, then.'

'How so?'

'Without doubt; the master of the house is myself.'

'You? And since when, may I ask?'

'These three days.'

'Good! the house was for sale then?'

'It appears so, since I purchased it.'

'But the former proprietor?'

'No longer inhabits it, as you see.'

'Where is he?'

'I know nothing about him.'

'Come, let us understand each other,' said Chicot.

'I ask nothing better,' replied Ernauton, with evident impatience; 'only let us come to an understanding quickly.'

'The former proprietor was a man from twenty-five to thirty years of age, who appeared forty.'

'No; he was a man of sixty-five or sixty-six, which appeared his age.'

'Bald.'

'No, on the contrary, with a forest of white hair.'

'He had an enormous cicatrice on the left side of his head, had he not?'

'I did not see the cicatrice, but a good number of wrinkles.'

'I can comprehend nothing of it,' said Chicot,

'But,' said Ernauton, after a moment's reflection, 'what do you want with this man, my dear Monsieur the Ghost?'

Chicot was about to avow what he came for. Suddenly the mystery of Ernauton's surprise reminded him of a certain proverb respected by discreet men.

'I wished to render him a little visit, quite neighbourly,' he said, 'nothing more.'

In this way Chicot uttered no falsehood, and said nothing.

'My dear sir,' said Ernauton, with politeness, but considerably diminishing the opening of the door, which he held half closed; 'my dear sir, I regret my inability to give you more precise information.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Chicot, 'I will seek elsewhere.'

'But,' continued Ernauton, continuing to close the door, 'this does not prevent my thanking the chance that has again put me in contact with you.'

'You wish me at the devil, eh!' murmured Chicot, returning salutation for salutation.

Still as, despite this mental reply, Chicot, in his pre-occupation, forgot to retire, Ernauton, enclosing his face between the door and the frame, said to him,—

'Good-night, sir.'

'One moment, Monsieur de Carmainges,' said Chicot.

'Sir, 'tis to my great regret,' replied Ernauton, 'but I cannot delay; I expect some one who will knock at this very door, and this some one would be vexed with me for not observing every possible discretion in receiving her.'

'Sufficient, sir, I understand,' said Chicot; 'pardon for having importuned you; I retire.'

'Adieu, dear Monsieur the Ghost.'

'Adieu, worthy Monsieur Ernauton.'

And Chicot, making a step backward, saw the door quietly shut in his face. He listened to discover if the mistrustful young man watched his departure, but Ernauton's step remounted the staircase. Chicot therefore could regain his house without uneasiness, in which

he shut himself up, firmly resolved not to trouble the habits of his young neighbour; but in accordance with his own custom, not to let him go too far out of sight.

In fact, Chicot was not a man to sleep upon a fact which appeared to him of so much importance, without having felt, turned over, and dissected this fact with the patience of an experienced anatomist; despite himself—and it was a privilege or defect of his organisation—despite himself, every form encrusted in his brain presented itself for analysis through these striking points, so that the cerebral walls of poor Chicot were wounded, pierced, and solicited to an immediate examination.

Chicot, who until now had been preoccupied with this phrase in the letter of the Duke de Guise :—

‘I entirely approve your plan regarding the Forty-Five,’ abandoned this phrase, of which he promised himself to resume the examination on a future occasion, to examine from the bottom, at the present sitting, the novel preoccupation which had usurped the place of the old preoccupation.

Chicot reflected that it was exceedingly strange to find Ernauton installing himself as master in this mysterious house, whose inhabitants had also suddenly disappeared. The more so, that with the original inhabitants, might well be connected for Chicot, a phrase of the letter of the Duke of Guise, relative to the Duke of Anjou.

This was a hazard worthy of remark, and Chicot had a habit of believing in providential hazards. He even developed on this point, when solicited, very ingenious theories. The base of these theories was an idea which, in our opinion, was as good as any other. This idea was as follows,—

Chance or hazard is an exception belonging to God.

The Almighty does not bestow his exception or reserve but under peculiar circumstances, especially since He has found men sagacious enough to study and foresee chances from nature, and elements regularly organised.

Now God loves, or should love, to baffle the combinations of these proud ones, whose former pride He has already punished by drowning them, and whose future pride he will punish by burning them.

God then, we say, or rather Chicot said, loves to baffle the combinations of these proud ones with elements that

are unknown to them, and the intervention of which they cannot foresee.

This theory, as we may see, contains special arguments, and may furnish brilliant theses; but as the reader, no doubt, is as eager as Chicot to ascertain what Carmainges did in this house, we will endeavour to hasten the development.

Chicot then reflected that it was strange to see Ernauton in this house in which he had seen Remy. He reflected that this was strange for two reasons; the first, from the perfect ignorance in which the two men lived of each other, and which made it probable that there must have been between them an intermediary unknown to Chicot.

The second, because the house must have been sold to Ernauton, who had not money to purchase it.

'It is true,' said Chicot to himself, installing himself as comfortably as possible in his gutter, his usual observatory; 'it is true that the young man pretends he is to have a visit, and that this visit is that of a woman; in the present day the women are rich, and allow themselves caprices. Ernauton is handsome, young, elegant; Ernauton has pleased. They have given him a rendezvous; they have told him to purchase this house; he has purchased the house, and accepts the rendezvous.'

'Ernauton,' continued Chicot, 'lives at court; it must, then, be some female of the court with whom he has an affair. Poor boy, will he love her? God preserve him! He is going to fall into that gulf of perdition. Good! am I not making a moral for him?

'A moral doubly useless, and quadruply stupid.

'Useless, because he does not hear it, and if he did hear it, he would not listen to it.

'Stupid, because I shall do much better to go to bed and think a little of that poor Borromée.

'On this head,' continued Chicot, becoming sombre, 'I perceive one thing; that is, that remorse does not exist, and is but a relative sentiment: the fact is, that I have no remorse for having killed Borromée, since the preoccupation in which the situation of M. de Carmainges places me, makes me forget that I have killed him; and he, on his part, if he had nailed me to the table, as I nailed him to the partition, would certainly not at this hour have more remorse than I have myself.'

Chicot was at this point of his reasoning of his inductions, and of his philosophy, which had occupied him for

a good hour and a half, when he was drawn from his preoccupation by the arrival of a litter coming from towards the hostelry of the Proud Chevalier.

This litter stopped at the threshold of the mysterious house.

A lady, veiled, descended from it, and immediately disappeared through the door that Ernauton held half open.

'Poor boy !' murmured Chicot, 'I was not deceived, and it was really a woman he expected, and now I shall go to sleep.'

And thereupon Chicot rose, but remaining motionless, though standing.

'I am wrong,' he said, 'I will not sleep; but I maintain what I said. If I do not sleep it will not be remorse that will prevent my sleeping, it will be curiosity; and it is so true what I am now saying, that if I remain at my observatory, I shall only be occupied with one thing, that of knowing which of our noble dames honours the handsome Ernauton with her love.'

'Much better, then, that I should remain at my observatory, since, if I go to bed, I shall certainly wake up to go there.'

And upon this, Chicot reseated himself.

An hour had nearly elapsed, without our being enabled to say whether Chicot thought of the unknown lady or of Borromée, whether he was preoccupied with curiosity or tormented by remorse, when he fancied he heard at the end of the street the gallop of a horse.

In fact, presently a cavalier appeared, enveloped in his cloak.

The horseman stopped in the middle of the street, and appeared to be endeavouring to recollect himself.

The horseman then perceived the group formed by the litter and the porters.

The cavalier pushed his horse towards them; he was armed, for his sword was heard striking against his spurs.

The porters attempted to oppose his passage, but he spoke to them a few words in a low tone, and they not only made way respectfully, but one of them also, as he put his foot on the ground, received from his hands the reins of his horse.

The unknown advanced towards the door, and knocked roughly at it.

'Tudieu !' said Chicot to himself, 'why, I have done

well to remain ! My presentiments, which announced to me that something was about to take place, did not deceive me. Here is the husband : poor Ernauton ! we shall assist presently at a scene of slaughter.

‘Yet if it is the husband, he is very kind to announce his return by knocking so roughly.’

At the same time, despite the magisterial fashion with which the stranger had knocked, they seemed to hesitate upon opening.

‘Open,’ cried the one who knocked.

‘Open, open,’ repeated the porters.

‘Decidedly,’ said Chicot, ‘tis the husband; he has threatened the porters to have them flogged or hung, and the porters are on his side.

‘Poor Ernauton, he will be flayed alive.

‘Oh ! oh ! if I allow it, however,’ added Chicot. ‘For indeed, he has assisted me, and in return I ought to assist him. Now it seems to me, the time has arrived or never will arrive.’

Chicot was resolute and generous, curious besides; he unfastened his long sword, placed it under his arm, and hastily descended his staircase.

Chicot knew how to open his door without making it creak, which is an indispensable science to whoever would listen with advantage.

Chicot glided under the balcony, behind a pillar, and waited.

Scarcely was he installed, when the opposite door opened, upon a word which the stranger whispered through the lock; he remained, however, on the threshold.

A moment after, the lady appeared in the archway of the door.

The lady took the arm of the cavalier, who led her to the litter, closed the door, and mounted on horseback.

‘No more doubt, ’twas the husband,’ said Chicot, ‘a good sort of a husband after all, since he does not search a little in the house, to have my friend Carmaingès disembowelled.’

The litter departed, the horseman riding at the side door.

‘By God,’ said Chicot to himself, ‘I must follow these people, that I may know what they are, and where they go; I shall certainly draw from my discovery some solid advice for my friend de Carmaingès.’

Chicot, in fact, followed the *cortège*, taking the precaution to remain under the shade of the walls, and to

extinguish his steps in the noise of the steps of men and horses.

Chicot's surprise was not moderated when he saw the litter stop before the auberge of the Proud Chevalier.

Almost immediately, as if some one watched, the door was opened.

The lady, still veiled, descended, entered and ascended to the tower, whose window, on the first floor, was lighted

The husband ascended behind her.

Both were respectfully preceded by Dame Fournichon, who held a flambeau in her hand.

'Decidedly,' said Chicot, crossing his arms, 'I comprehend nothing of it.'

CHAPTER LXXXV

HOW CHICOT BEGAN TO SEE CLEARLY THROUGH THE LETTER OF M. THE DUKE OF GUISE

CHICOT firmly believed he had seen somewhere the figure of this complaisant cavalier; but his memory having been a little mystified during his journey to Navarre, did not furnish him with his usual facility with the name he wished to pronounce.

Whilst concealed in the shade, he asked himself, his eyes fixed on the lighted window, what this man and woman were come to do in a *tête-à-tête* at the Proud Chevalier, forgetting Ernauton in the mysterious house; our worthy Gascon saw the door of the hostelry open, and in the ray of light which escaped from the opening, he perceived something like the black shadow of a little monk.

This shadow stopped an instant to examine the same window that Chicot was observing.

'Oh! oh!' he murmured, 'this, I think, is a Jacobin's robe; does Maître Gorenflot so relax the discipline then, that he permits his sheep to go about vagabondising at such an hour of the night, and at such a distance from the priory?' Chicot followed with his eyes this Jacobin, whilst he descended the Rue des Augustins, and a certain peculiar instinct told him that he should find in this monk the explanation of the riddle which until now he had vainly sought for.

Besides, when Chicot fancied he recognised the figure of the cavalier, he also thought he recognised in the little

monk a certain movement of the shoulder, a certain military strut, which only belongs to the habitués of the fencing and gymnastic rooms.

'I'll be hanged,' he murmured, 'if this robe does not cover that little miscreant whom they wished to give me as a travelling companion, and who so skilfully handles the arquebus and the foils.'

Scarcely had this idea occurred to Chicot, than, to assure himself of its value, he stretched his long legs, and in ten strides rejoined the little brother, who walked, holding up his robe over his small and nervous leg, to proceed the quicker.

This was not very difficult, indeed, seeing that the monk stopped every now and then, to give a look behind him, as though he left with much trouble and very deep regret.

This glance was constantly directed towards the flaming windows of the hostelry.

Chicot had not made ten paces ere he was certain he had not been wrong in his conjectures.

'Holloa! my little neighbour,' he said; 'holloa! my little Jacquot. Holloa! my little Clement. Halt!'

And he pronounced the last word in so military a fashion that the monk started.

'Who calls me?' demanded the young man, in a rude accent, and more provocative than benevolent.

'Me!' replied Chicot, pulling up before the Jacobin; 'me, do you recognise me, my son?'

'Oh! Monsieur Robert Briquet,' exclaimed the little monk.

'Myself, little one. And where are you going at this rate, so late, my dear child?'

'To the priory, Monsieur Briquet.'

'So be it. But where do you come from?'

'Me?'

'No doubt, you little libertine.'

The young man started.

'I do not know what you mean, Monsieur Briquet,' he resumed. 'I am, on the contrary, sent on a commission of importance by Dom Modeste, and himself will assure you of it, if necessary.'

'There, there, softly, my little Saint Jerome, we take fire like a match, as it seems.'

'Is there not a cause, when we hear oneself called as you have called me?'

'Well, 'tis, you see, that a robe like yours, issuing from a cabaret at such an hour.'

'From a cabaret! me?'

'Undoubtedly; is not this a cabaret you have just left, is it not that of the Proud Chevalier? Oh! you see plainly that I have caught you!'

'I left this house,' said Clement, 'you are right: but I did not come from a cabaret.'

'How!' said Chicot, 'the hostelry of the Proud Chevalier is not a cabaret?'

'A cabaret is a house where they drink, and as I have not drank in that house, that house is not a cabaret for me.'

'The devil! the distinction is ingenious, and I am much mistaken, if you do not one day become a strong theologian; but still if you do not go to this house to drink, for what did you go then?'

Clement did not reply, and Chicot could read on his countenance, in spite of the obscurity, a firm resolution not to say a word more.

This resolution greatly disconcerted our friend, who had got into a habit of knowing everything.

It was not that Clement showed any perverseness in his silence; quite the contrary; he appeared delighted at meeting in so unexpected a manner, his learned professor of arms, Maître Robert Briquet, and he had shown all the warmth one could expect from this concentrated and harsh nature.

The conversation had completely dropped. Chicot, to renew it, was on the point of pronouncing the name of brother Borromée, but although Chicot had no remorse, or thought he had not, the name expired on his lips.

The young man, whilst remaining silent, seemed to expect something; he seemed to regard it as a happiness to remain as long as possible in the neighbourhood of the Proud Chevalier.

Robert Briquet attempted to speak of the journey which the youth had for a moment hoped to make with him.

The eyes of Jacques Clement sparkled at the words space and liberty.

Robert Briquet recounted, that in the country he had visited, fencing was held in great honour; he added negligently, that he had even brought home some wonderful coups.

This was putting Jacques on burning ground. He

requested to know these thrusts, and Chicot, with his long arm, described some on the arms of the little brother.

But these attempts of Chicot did not soften the obstinacy of the little Clement; and whilst endeavouring to parry the novel thrusts which his friend Robert Briquet showed him, he kept an obstinate silence respecting the object of his visit in this quarter.

Vexed, but master of himself, Chicot resolved to attempt an injustice; injustice is one of the most powerful provocations that was ever invented to force a confession from women, children, and inferiors, of whatever nature they may be.

‘No matter, little one,’ he said, as if returning to his first idea, ‘no matter, you are a charming little monk; but you visit hostelries, and such hostelries too, in those where pretty women are found, and you stop in ecstasy before the window where their shadow is seen; little one, little one, I shall tell it to Dom Modeste.’

The blow struck home, more true even than Chicot had supposed, for he did not suspect, in commencing, that the wound would have been so deep.

Jacques turned round, like a serpent we tread underfoot.

‘It is not true,’ he exclaimed, red with shame and rage, ‘I do not look at women.’

‘Yes, yes,’ pursued Chicot, ‘there was, however, a very handsome lady at the Proud Chevalier, when you left it, and you turned to see her once more, and I know that you awaited her in the little tower, and I know that you have spoken to her.’

Chicot proceeded by induction.

Jacques could not contain himself.

‘No doubt I have spoken to her,’ he exclaimed, ‘is it a crime to speak to women?’

‘No, when we do not speak to them from our own impulse, and pushed by the temptation of Satan.’

‘Satan has nothing to do in all this, and it was necessary I should speak to this woman, since I was charged to deliver her a letter.’

‘Charged by Dom Modeste?’ exclaimed Chicot.

‘Yes, now go and complain to him.’

Chicot, amazed for a moment, and groping in the dark, felt at these words a flash crossing the obscurity of his brain.

‘Ah! I knew it well,’ he said.

‘What did you know?’

'What you will not tell me.'

'I do not tell my own secrets, much less those of others.'

'Yes; but to me.'

'Why to you?'

'Me, who am a friend of Dom Modeste, and besides to me——'

'Well?'

'To me, who know beforehand all that you could tell me.'

The little Jacques regarded Chicot, shaking his head with a smile of incredulity.

'Well!' said Chicot, 'would you like me to recount to you what you will not recount to me?'

'I should like it much,' said Jacques.

Chicot made an effort.

'First,' said he, 'that poor Borromée.'

The countenance of Jacques became gloomy.

'Oh!' said the youth, 'if I had been there——'

'If you had been there?'

'The matter should not have passed as it did.'

'You would have defended him against the Swiss with whom he had got into a quarrel.'

'I would have defended him against the whole world!'

'So that he would not have been killed?'

'Or I would have been killed with him.'

'Yet you were not there, so that the poor devil gave up the ghost in a wretched hostelry, and in dying, pronounced the name of Dom Modeste.'

'Yes.'

'So well, that they apprised Dom Modeste?'

'A man, all wildness, who raised an alarm in the convent.'

'And Dom Modeste sent for his litter, and hastened to the Horn of Abundance.'

'From whence do you know that?'

'Oh! you do not know me yet, little one; I am something of a sorcerer.'

Jacques drew back two steps.

'This is not all,' continued Chicot, who became clearer in proportion as he spoke to the proper meaning of the words; 'they found a letter in the pocket of the deceased man.'

'A letter, just so.'

'And Dom Modeste has charged his little Jacques to carry this letter to its address.'

'Yes.'

'And the little Jacques ran on the very instant to the Hôtel de Guise ?'

'Oh !'

'Where he found no one——'

'Good God !'

'But M. de Mayneville.'

'Mercy !'

'Which M. de Mayneville conducted Jacques to the hotel of the Proud Chevalier.'

'Monsieur Briquet, Monsieur Briquet,' exclaimed Jacques, 'if you know that !'

'Why, ventre de biche, you see plainly that I know it,' exclaimed Chicot, triumphant at having freed this enigma, so important for him, from the swaddling clothes in which it was at first enveloped.

'Then you see,' resumed Jacques, 'that I am not guilty, Monsieur Briquet.'

'No,' said Chicot, 'you are neither guilty of commission or omission, but you are guilty in thought.'

'Me ?'

'Without doubt, you find the duchess very handsome.'

'Me !'

'And you turn back to see her again through the window.'

'Me !'

The monk blushed and stammered :—

'It's true; she resembles a Virgin Mary which was at my mother's bedside.'

'Oh !' murmured Chicot, 'how many things are lost by men who are not curious !'

He then made the little Jacques, whom he now held at discretion, recount to him all he had narrated himself; but this time with details which he could not know.

'You see,' said Chicot, when he had finished, 'what a poor fencing-master you had in brother Borromée !'

'Monsieur Briquet,' said the little Jacques, 'we must not speak ill of the dead.'

'No, but confess one thing.'

'Which ?'

'That Borromée did not draw so well as he who killed him.'

'It's true.'

'And now this is all I had to tell you. Good-night, my little Jacques, adieu, and if you like——'

'What, Monsieur Briquet ?'

'Well! 'tis I who will give you lessons in fencing for the future.'

'Oh! very willingly.'

'Now *en route*, *en route*, little one, for they are impatiently awaiting you at the priory.'

'It's true; thank you, Monsieur Chicot, for reminding me of it.'

And the little monk disappeared.

It was not without reason that Chicot had dismissed his companion. He had drawn from him all he wished to know, and on the other side, something yet remained for him to learn.

He reached his house with rapid strides. The litter, the porters, and the horse were still at the door of the Proud Chevalier.

He regained his gutter without noise. The house opposite his own was still lighted. From this moment, all his attention was turned to this house.

He saw at first, through the crevices of a curtain, pass and repass, Ernauton, who seemed to be waiting with impatience.

He then saw the litter return, he saw Mayneville depart; at length, he saw the duchess enter the room in which Ernauton palpitated rather than breathed.

Ernauton knelt before the duchess, who gave him her white hand to kiss.

The duchess then raised the young man, and made him sit opposite to her at a table elegantly served.

'Tis strange,' said Chicot; 'this commenced by a conspiracy, and finishes very much like a rendezvous.'

'Yes,' continued Chicot, 'but who has given this rendezvous of love?'

'Madame de Montpensier.'

Then, enlightening himself with a new idea.

'Oh! oh!' he murmured, 'Dear sister, I approve your plan respecting the Forty-Five; only permit me to tell you, 'tis a great honour you do these rascals.'

'Ventre de biche!' exclaimed Chicot, 'I come back to my first idea; it is not love, 'tis a conspiracy.'

'Madame the Duchess of Montpensier loves M. Ernauton de Carmainges; let us watch the loves of Madame the Duchess.'

And Chicot watched till half-past twelve, the hour at which Ernauton fled, his cloak over his nose, whilst Madame the Duchess of Montpensier remounted her litter.

'Now,' murmured Chicot, in descending the staircase, 'what is this chance of death which is to free M. de Guise of the presumptive heir to the crown? who are these persons supposed to be dead, but who are living?

'Mordieu! I might well be on their track!'

CHAPTER LXXXVI

THE CARDINAL DE JOYEUSE

YOUTH has its obstinacies in good and evil, which equal in worth the steadier resolutions of a riper age.

Directed towards good, these sort of prejudices produce great actions, and impress on the man who is entering into life a movement which pushes him, by a natural inclination, towards heroism of some sort.

Thus Bayard and Duguesclin became celebrated captains, from being the most morose and the most intractable children ever seen; thus the keeper of pigs, whom nature made the herdsman of Montalte, and whom genius made Sextus Quintus, became a great pope for having been obstinate in badly attending to his work as pig-keeper.

Thus the worst Spartan natures develop themselves in the way of heroism, after having commenced by obstinacy in dissimulation and cruelty.

We have here but to trace the portrait of an ordinary man; yet more than one biographer has found in Henri du Bouchage, at twenty, the foundation of a great man.

Henri persisted in his love and his retirement from the world; as his brother had requested of him, as the King had demanded of him, he remained some days alone with his eternal thoughts. His resolution then became more and more unchangeable; he decided, one morning, to visit his brother the cardinal, an important personage who, at the age of twenty-six, had already been a cardinal for two years, and who, from Archbishop of Narbonne, had passed to the highest step of ecclesiastical greatness, thanks to the nobleness of his race, and the strength of his mind.

Francis de Joyeuse, whom we have already introduced, to clear up the doubt of Henri de Valois respecting Scylla—Francis de Joyeuse, young and worldly, handsome and spirituel, was one of the most remarkable men of the period. Ambitious by nature, but prudent from calculation and from position, Francis de Joyeuse might take

for a device, *Rien n'est trop* ('Nothing is too much'), and justify his device.

Perhaps, alone, of all the men of the court (and Francis de Joyeuse was a courtier, above everything), he had known how to erect for himself two supports of the two thrones, religious and laical, from which he sprung, both as a French gentleman and as a prince of the church; Sextus protected him against Henry III.—Henry III. protected him against Sextus. He was an Italian at Paris, a Parisian at Rome—magnificent and able everywhere. The sword, alone, of Joyeuse the grand admiral, gave to the latter greater weight in the balance; but it was seen from certain smiles of the cardinal, that if he failed in these mighty temporal weapons, which, elegant as he was, were so well handled by the hands of his brother, he knew how to use, and even abuse, the spiritual weapons confided to him by the sovereign head of the church.

The Cardinal Francis de Joyeuse had promptly become rich, rich of his own patrimony at first, and afterwards from his own benefices. In those times the church possessed, and even possessed much, and when its treasures were exhausted, it knew the sources, at present drained, from whence to replace them.

Francis de Joyeuse lived in good style. Leaving to his brother the military pride of the family, he filled his antechambers with curates, bishops, and archbishops; he had his speciality. Once cardinal, as he was prince of the church, and consequently superior to his brother, he had pages in the Italian fashion and guards in the French fashion. But these guards and pages were for him nothing more than a greater means of liberty. Frequently he ranged guards and pages round a large litter, through the curtains of which passed the gloved hand of the secretary, whilst himself on horseback, the sword by his side, ran through the town disguised with a wig, an enormous ruff, and the boots of a cavalier, the noise of which rejoiced his soul.

The cardinal, then, enjoyed a very great consideration; for, at certain elevations, human fortunes are absorbing, and force, as if they were composed of nothing but crooked atoms, all other fortunes to ally themselves to them as satellites, and from this reason, the glorious name of his father, the recent and wide-spread glory of his brother Anne, reflected upon him all their lustre. Besides, as he

had scrupulously followed this precept, to conceal his life and to extend his imagination, he was only known by his best side; and in his own family, even, passed for a very great man, a happiness not enjoyed by many emperors charged with the glory and crowned by the voice of a whole nation.

It was with this prelate that the Count du Bouchage took refuge after his explanation with his brother, after his conversation with the King of France. But, as we have said, he allowed several days to elapse, to obey the injunctions of his elder and his King.

Francis inhabited a handsome house in the city. The immense court of this house was not without cavaliers and litters; but the prelate, whose garden adjoined the bank of the river, allowed his court and antechambers to fill with courtiers; and as he had a door of egress to the beach, and a boat that transported him quietly as far and as gently as he pleased, near this door he frequently arrived when they in vain awaited the prelate, to whom a serious indisposition or an austere penitence served as a pretext for not receiving. It was still Italy in the bosom of the good city of the King of France; it was Venice embraced by the Seine.

Francis was proud, but not in the least vain; he loved his friends as brothers, and his brothers almost as much as his friends. The senior of du Bouchage by five years, he did not withhold from him either good or bad advice; neither his purse nor his smile.

But as the habit of a cardinal was extremely becoming to him, du Bouchage thought him handsome, noble, almost terrifying, so that he respected him, perhaps, more than he respected the elder of both. Henri, under his rich cuirass and gold lace, confided, in trembling, his loves to Anne; he had not even dared to confess himself to Francis.

Yet, when he directed his steps to the hotel of the cardinal, his resolution was taken; he frankly met the confessor first, the friend afterwards.

He entered the court, from which, at the same moment, issued several gentlemen; wearied of having solicited, without obtaining, the favour of an audience.

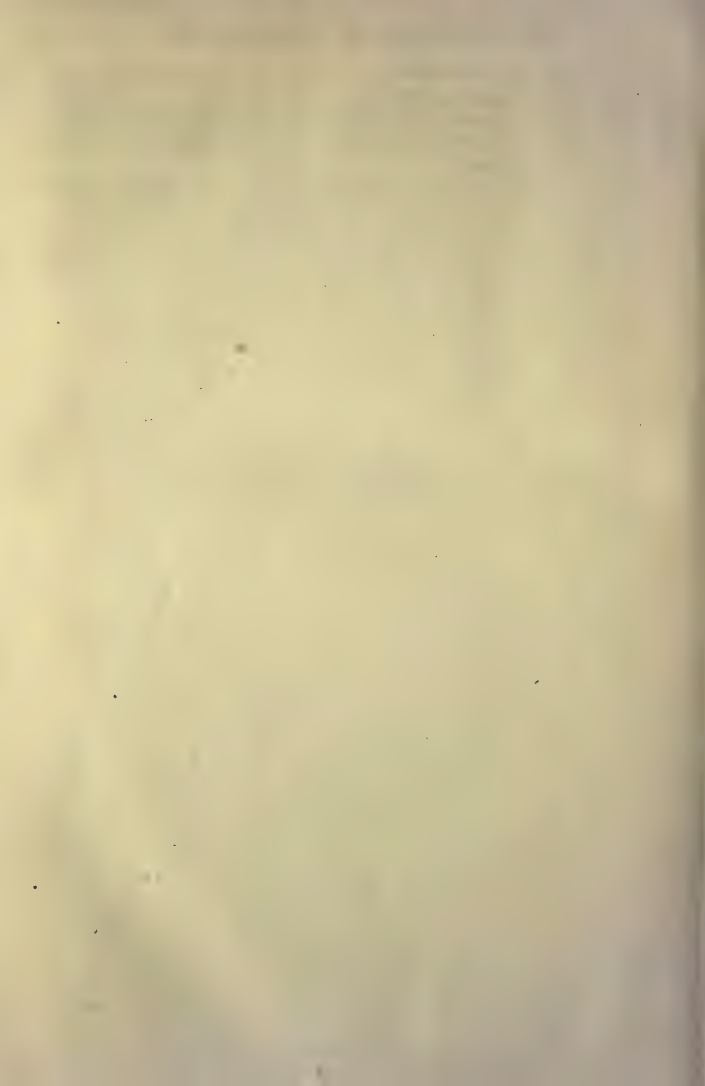
He traversed the antechambers, the halls, then the apartments. He had been told, like the rest, that his brother was in conference; but no domestic had thought of shutting the door against du Bouchage.



F.G.

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'The King stopped at the threshold of the door.'



Du Bouchage, therefore, crossed the apartments, and arrived at the garden, the veritable garden of a Roman prelate, with shade and freshness, and perfumes, such as may at present be found in the Villa Pamphile, or at the Borghese Palace.

Henri stopped under a building; at this moment the gate leading from the beach opened, and a man entered, hidden under a large brown cloak, and followed by a sort of page. This man observed Henri, who was too much absorbed in his reverie to notice him, and glided between the trees, avoiding being seen by du Bouchage or any one else.

Henri paid no attention to this mysterious entry; it was only on turning round that he saw the man enter the apartments. After waiting about five minutes, he was about to enter in his turn, and to question a footman, to ascertain precisely at what hour his brother would be visible; when a domestic, who appeared to be seeking him, perceived him, came to him, and begged him to pass to the library, where the cardinal awaited him.

Henri repaired slowly to this invitation, for he expected a fresh struggle: he found his brother the cardinal, on whom a valet de chambre was placing the habit of a prelate, a little worldly perhaps, but elegant, and above all, comfortable.

'Good-day, count,' said the cardinal; 'what news, my brother?'

'Excellent news, as to our family: Anne, you know, has covered himself with glory in the retreat from Antwerp, and lives.'

'And, thank God, you also are safe and sound, Henri?'

'Yes, my brother.'

'You see,' said the cardinal, 'God watches over us.'

'My brother, I am so grateful to God, that I have formed the project of consecrating myself to His service. I am come, therefore, to talk to you seriously of this project, which to me appears ripe, and about which I have already spoken to you.'

'You still think of this, du Bouchage?' said the cardinal, allowing a slight exclamation to escape him, which indicated that Joyeuse was about to give battle.

'Still, my brother.'

'But 'tis impossible, Henri,' said the cardinal, 'have you not already been told so?'

'I have not listened to what I have been told, my

brother, because a more powerful voice that speaks to me; prevents me from hearing a word that would turn me from God.'

'You are not so ignorant of worldly affairs, my brother,' said the cardinal, in the most serious tone, 'as to believe that this voice is really the voice of God; on the contrary, and I will affirm it, 'tis a sentiment quite worldly that speaks to you. God has nothing to do in this affair; do not, therefore, abuse His sacred name, and especially do not confound the voice of Heaven with that of earth.'

'I do not confound, my brother, I simply mean that something irresistible draws me towards solitude and retirement.'

'Very probably, Henri, and we return to proper terms. Well! my dear, you must do this; I will, taking you at your word, render you the happiest of men.'

'Thank you, oh! thank you, my brother!'

'Listen to me, Henri. You must take money, two squires, and travel throughout Europe, as becomes a son of the house to which we belong. You will see distant countries, Tartary, even Russia, and the Laplanders, those fabulous people whom the sun never visits; you shall bury yourself in your thoughts until the devouring germ, that fomented in you, is either extinguished or soothed. We will then meet again.'

Henri, who was seated, rose more serious than his brother had ever been.

'You have not understood me, monseigneur,' he said.

'Pardon, Henri, you said retreat or solitude.'

'Yes, I said that, but by retreat or solitude, I meant the cloister, my brother, and not travels; to travel is still to enjoy life, I would almost suffer death, and if I do not suffer it, would at least taste it.'

'This is an absurd idea, permit me to tell you, Henri, for in fact he who wishes to isolate himself, is alone everywhere. But be it so—the cloister. Well! I understand that you are come to me to speak of this project. I know some very learned Benedictins, some Augustins very ingenious, whose houses are gay, flowery, easy, and comfortable. In the midst of works of science and of art, you shall pass a delightful year, in good company, which is important, for we ought not to grow musty in this world; and if at the end of this twelvemonth, you persist in your project, why! my dear Henri, I will offer you no

further opposition, and myself will open the door that shall lead you to eternal salvation.'

'Decidedly you do not comprehend me, my brother,' replied du Bouchage, shaking his head, 'or rather your generous imagination will not comprehend me; 'tis not a gay resting-place, an amiable retreat that I wish for, 'tis the rigour of the cloister, dark and tomb-like; I am decided upon pronouncing my vows, vows that will only leave me for amusement to dig a grave, or utter a long prayer.'

The cardinal knit his brow, and rose from his seat.

'Yes,' he said, 'I had perfectly comprehended, and I attempted by my resistance, without set phrases or logic, to combat the folly of your resolutions; but you force me. Listen to me.'

'Ah! my brother,' said Henri dejectedly, 'do not endeavour to convince me, 'tis impossible.'

'My brother, I shall speak to you, in the name of God, at first, of God whom you offend by saying that this wild resolution comes from Him. God accepts not such unreflected sacrifices. You are feeble, since you allow yourself to be cast down by a first grief; how will God receive willingly the almost unworthy victim you offer Him?'

Henri made a movement.

'Oh! I will no longer humour you, my brother, you who humour none amongst us,' continued the cardinal; 'you who forget the chagrin you cause our father, our elder brother, and myself.'

'Pardon,' interrupted Henri, whose cheeks were covered with redness, 'pardon, monseigneur; is the service of God a work so gloomy and so dishonouring that a whole family mourns it? You, my brother, whose protrait I see in this chamber, with this gold, these diamonds, this purple, are you not the joy and the honour of our house, although you have chosen the service of God, as my elder brother that of the kings of the earth?'

'Child! child!' exclaimed the cardinal, with impatience, 'you will make me believe your head is turned. How! you compare my palace to a cloister; my hundred valets, my piqueurs, my gentlemen, and my guards, to the cell and the besom, which are the only weapons and the only riches of the cloister! are you mad? Did you not say just now that you repulsed these superfluities which are necessary to me, the paintings, the precious vases, pomp, and noise? Have you, like me, the desire and the

hope of placing on your brow the diadem of Saint Peter ? This is a career, Henri, we run, we struggle, we live ! but you, you—'tis the spade of the trappist, the mine of the engineer, the tomb of the grave-digger. What would you ? no air, no joy, no hope ! And all this, I blush for you who are a man, all this because you love a woman who does not return your love. Really, Henri, you wrong your family !'

'My brother !' exclaimed the young man, pale, and his eyes shining with an unnatural lustre, 'would you rather I should fracture my skull by a pistol shot, or take advantage of the honour I have in carrying a sword to run it through my heart. Pardieu ! monseigneur, you who are cardinal and prince, give me absolution for this mortal sin, the thing will be done so quickly that you will not have had time to finish the ugly and unworthy thought ; that I dishonour my race, which, I thank God, a Joyeuse will never do.'

'Come, come, Henri,' said the cardinal, drawing his brother towards him, and pressing him in his arms, 'come, dear child, beloved by all, forget, and be merciful to those who love you. I beseech you for myself. Listen : it is a rare thing in this world, but we are all happy—some by satisfied ambition, others by the blessings of every sort that God showers over our existence : do not cast then, I entreat you, Henri, the mortal poison of retreat over the joys of your family. Consider that our father will weep at it, consider that we shall all carry on our brows the mourning you will place us in. I adjure you, Henri, to give way a little ; the cloister is of no worth to you ; I will not say to you that you will die there, for you will reply to me, unhappy child, by a smile, alas ! too intelligible. No, I will say to you that the cloister is more fatal than the tomb ; the tomb only extinguishes life, the cloister extinguishes intelligence ; the cloister bows the head, instead of lifting it to heaven, the humidity of vaults passes by degrees into the blood, and penetrates into the very marrow of the bones. My brother, beware ; we have but a few years, we have but one youth. Well ! the years of happy youth will also pass, for you are under the empire of a heavy grief, but at thirty you will be a man, the juice of manhood will come ; it will draw with it the remains of worn-out grief, and you will then revive. But it will be too late, for you will then be melancholy, frightful, and suffering ; your heart will have no warmth

in it, your eye will not sparkle; those you seek will fly from you as from a whitened sepulchre whose dark profundity is feared by every eye. Henri, I speak to you in friendship, and with prudence; listen to me.'

The young man remained motionless and silent. The cardinal hoped he had softened him and shaken him in his resolution.

'Stay,' said he, 'try another resource, Henri; this poisoned arrow that you drag in your heart, carry it everywhere, in noise, in fêtes, sit with it at our feasts; imitate the wounded deer, who traverses the copse, the thicket, and the bramble, to endeavour to draw from his flank the arrow retained at the lips of the wound; sometimes the arrow falls.'

'My brother, for pity's sake,' said Henri, 'insist no more; what I ask of you is not the caprice of a moment, the decision of an hour, 'tis the result of a slow and painful resolution. My brother, in the name of Heaven, I adjure you to grant me the favour I request from you.'

'Well! what favour do you demand of me; let us hear?'

'A dispensation, monseigneur.'

'For what purpose?'

'To abridge my noviciate.'

'Ah! I knew it, du Bouchage, you are worldly even in your sternness, poor friend. Oh! I know the reason you will give me. Oh! yes, you are really a man of our world, you resemble those young men who become volunteers, and who are fond enough of fire, shots, and bullets, but not of the labour of the trenches or the sweeping of the tents. There is resource, Henri; so much the better, so much the better!'

'The dispensation, my brother, the dispensation. I ask it on my knees.'

'I promise it you, I will write to Rome. A month will elapse before the reply arrives; but, in exchange, promise me one thing.'

'What?'

'That during this delay of a month, to refuse no pleasure that may present itself to you; and if in a month, you are still firm in your projects, Henri, well! I will deliver you this dispensation with my own hand. Are you satisfied, now; and have you nothing else to ask?'

'No, my brother, thank you; but a month, 'tis so long, and delays will kill me.'

'In the meantime, my brother, and to commence your distraction, will it please you to breakfast with me? I have good company this morning.'

And the prelate smiled with an air that would have been envied by the most worldly favourites of Henry the Third.

'My brother,' said du Bouchage, excusing himself.

'I admit no excuse, you have only myself here, as you arrive from Flanders, and your house cannot be yet prepared.'

At these words the cardinal rose, and drawing a screen that masked a large cabinet sumptuously furnished,—

'Come, countess,' he said, 'let us persuade the Count du Bouchage to remain with us.'

But at the moment the cardinal had raised the screen, Henri saw, half reclining on the cushions, the page who had entered with the gentleman from the gate of the beach, and in this page, even before the prelate had announced her sex, he had recognised a woman.

Something like a sudden terror, like an invincible fear took possession of him; and whilst the worldly cardinal went to take the handsome page by the hand, Henri du Bouchage rushed from the apartment, and so well that when Francis brought in the lady, all smiling with the hope of bringing back a heart to the world, the room was completely deserted.

Francis knit his brow, and seating himself before a table loaded with papers and letters, he hastily wrote a few lines.

'Be kind enough to ring, dear countess,' he said, 'you have your hand on the bell.'

The page obeyed.

A confidential valet de chambre appeared.

'Let a courier mount instantly on horseback,' said Francis, 'and carry this letter to the Grand Admiral at Châteaueu Thierry.'

CHAPTER LXXXVII

NEWS OF AURILLY IS RECEIVED

THE next day the King was at work at the Louvre with the superintendent of finances, when he was apprised that M. de Joyeuse the elder had just arrived, and awaited him in the grand cabinet of audience, having come from Château Thierry, with a message from the Duke of Anjou.

The King hastily quitted his work, and ran to meet so dear a friend.

A good number of officers and courtiers filled the cabinet; the queen-mother had come this evening escorted by her ladies of honour.

The King gave Joyeuse his hand to kiss, and threw a glance of satisfaction at the assembly. In the angle of the entrance door, in his usual place, was Henri du Bouchage, rigorously fulfilling his services and his duties.

The King thanked him, and saluted him with a friendly shake of the head, to which Henri replied by a low bow. These recognitions made Joyeuse turn his head, who smiled from a distance at his brother, without, however, saluting him too visibly, from a fear of offending against etiquette.

'Sire,' said Joyeuse, 'I am sent to your Majesty from the Duke of Anjou, recently returned from the expedition to Antwerp.'

'My brother is well, Monsieur the Admiral?' said the King.

'As well as the state of his spirits will allow; yet I will not conceal from your Majesty that monseigneur appears suffering.'

'He will require distractions after his misfortune,' said the King, happy at proclaiming aloud the check that had happened to his brother, whilst appearing to pity him.

'I think, yes, sire.'

'We have heard, Monsieur the Admiral, that the disaster was cruel.'

'Sire.'

'But that, thanks to you, a good portion of the army was saved; thanks, Monsieur the Admiral, thanks. Does this poor M. d'Anjou wish to see us?'

'Ardently, sire.'

'Then we will see him. Are you of this opinion, madame?' said Henri, turning towards Catherine, whose heart suffered all that her countenance persisted in concealing.

'Sire,' she replied, 'I should have gone alone to my son; but since your Majesty deigns to concur with me in this token of friendship, the journey will appear to me a party of pleasure.'

'You will come with us, gentlemen,' said the King to the courtiers; 'we will start to-morrow; I shall sleep at Meaux.'

'Sire, then I shall announce to monseigneur good news?'

'No; quit me so soon, Monsieur the Admiral! not so. I can understand that a Joyeuse is loved by my brother, and desired; but we have two of them, thank God. Du Bouchage, you shall start for Château Thierry, if you please.'

'Sire,' said Henri, 'may I be allowed, after having announced the arrival of your Majesty to Monseigneur the Duke of Anjou, to return to Paris?'

'You will do as you like, du Bouchage,' said the King.

Henri bowed and went towards the door. Luckily, Joyeuse watched him.

'Will you allow me to say a word to my brother, sire?' he said.

'Speak. But what is it?' said the King quietly.

'It is that he will use his spurs to fulfil the commission, and do the same to return; which will counteract my projects, sire, and those of the cardinal.'

'Go then, and reprimand for me this mad lover.'

Anne hastened after his brother, and rejoined him in the antechambers.

'Well,' said Joyeuse, 'you leave in great haste, Henri?'

'Why, yes, my brother.'

'Because you would soon return?'

'It's true.'

'You do not intend to remain long at Château Thierry?'

'As shortly as possible.'

'Why so?'

'Where amusement is, my brother, there is no place for me.'

'Tis exactly on the contrary, Henri, because Monseigneur the Duke of Anjou must give fêtes to the court, that you ought to remain at Château Thierry.'

'It is impossible for me, my brother.'

'On account of your wish for retirement?—of your project of austerity?'

'Yes, my brother.'

'You have been with the King to demand a dispensation?'

'Who told you that?'

'I know it.'

'It's true, I went to him.'

'You will not obtain it.'

'Why so, my brother?'

'Because the King has no interest in depriving himself of a servant like you.'

'My brother the cardinal then, will do what His Majesty refuses to do.'

'For a woman! all this!'

'Anne, I entreat you, insist no more.'

'Oh! be tranquil, I shall not recommence, but once more, let us come to the point. You depart for Château Thierry; well, instead of returning as speedily as you wish, I desire that you wait for me in my apartment; it is a long time since we have lived together; I wish, understand this, to be again with you.'

'My brother, you go to Château Thierry to amuse yourself. If I remain at Château Thierry, I shall embitter your pleasures, my brother.'

'Oh! no, no! I can resist, and am of a happy temperament, very proper to effect a breach in your melancholy.'

'My brother.'

'Permit me, count,' said the admiral, with an imperious persistence, 'I here represent our father, and enjoin you to await me at Château Thierry; you will find there my apartment, which will be yours. From the ground-floor, it looks on the park.'

'If you order, my brother,' said Henri, with resignation.

'Call it what name you like, count, desire or order, but wait for me.'

'I shall obey, my brother.'

'And I am persuaded that you will not be angry with me,' added Joyeuse, pressing the young man in his arms.'

The latter slid away rather out of temper, perhaps, from the fraternal embrace, demanded his horses, and started immediately for Château Thierry.

He journeyed with the rage of a thwarted man, that is, he devoured space.

On the same evening he climbed, in darkness, the hill on which Château Thierry is situated, with the Maine at its feet.

His name opened to him every door of the château inhabited by the prince; but as to an audience, he was more than an hour in obtaining it.

'The prince,' said some, 'was in his apartments; 'he slept,' said the others; 'he was composing music,' supposed the valet de chambre.

But none amongst the domestics could give a positive answer.

Henri insisted, that he might no longer have the

service of the King to think of, and might, thenceforth, yield himself entirely to his melancholy.

Upon thus insisting, and as both he and his brother were known to be familiar with the duke, they showed him into one of the saloons on the first floor, where the prince at length consented to receive him.

Half an hour elapsed, darkness imperceptibly crept on.

The heavy and dragging step of the Duke of Anjou resounded in the gallery; Henri, who recognised him, prepared himself for the usual ceremony.

But the prince, who seemed much pressed, soon dispensed with these formalities from his ambassador, by taking his hand and embracing him.

'Good day, count,' he said, 'why did they disturb you to come and see a poor vanquished man?'

'The King sends me, monseigneur, to apprise you that he has a great wish to see your royal highness, and that, to allow you to repose from your fatigues, the King will meet you and will visit Château Thierry to-morrow at the latest.

'The King will come to-morrow!' exclaimed Francis, with a movement of impatience. But quickly added,—

'To-morrow, to-morrow, but really nothing will be ready at the château, nor in the town, to receive His Majesty.'

Henri bowed like a man who transmits his order, but who is not charged to comment upon it.

'The great haste their Majesties have to see your royal highness, has not allowed them to think of the inconvenience.'

'Well! well!' said the prince hastily, 'tis for me to double the time, I therefore leave you, Henri; thanks for your speed, for you have journeyed quickly, to all appearance; rest yourself.'

'Your highness has no other orders to give me?' said Henri respectfully.

'None; go to bed. They will serve you in your room, count. I have no service this evening; I am suffering, uneasy; I have lost appetite and sleep, which produces in me a mournful life, and in which, you comprehend, I do not make any one participate. By the way, you know the news?'

'No, monseigneur, what news?'

'Aurilly has been eaten by the wolves.'

'Aurilly!' exclaimed Henri, with surprise.

'Eh! yes, devoured! 'tis strange, how everything that approaches me dies unhappily. Good-night, count, sleep well.' And the prince retired with a rapid step.

CHAPTER LXXXVIII

DOUBT

HENRI descended, and in crossing the antechambers, he found many officers of his acquaintance, who hastened to him, and kindly offered to conduct him to the apartment of his brother, situated in one of the angles of the château.

It was the library which the duke had given as a residence to Joyeuse during his stay at Château Thierry.

Two saloons, furnished in the time of Francis the First, communicated with each other, and adjoined the library; this last place looked upon the gardens.

It was in the library that Joyeuse had had his bed arranged, being an idle man, though of a cultivated mind : by stretching out his hand he touched upon science, by opening the windows he tasted of nature. Superior organisations need more complete enjoyments, and the breeze of the morning, the song of the birds, or the perfume of the flowers, added a new charm to the verses of Clement Marot, or the odes of Rousait.

Henri decided that he would keep all things as they were, not that he was moved by the poetic sybaritism of his brother, but, on the contrary, by indifference, and because it was unimportant to him, whether there or elsewhere.

But as, in whatever state of mind the count was, he had been brought up never to neglect his duties towards the King or the princes of the house of France, he informed himself with the greatest care, of that part of the château inhabited by the prince since his return.

Chance, in this instance, sent an excellent cicerone to Henri; it was the young ensign, whose indiscretion had, in the little Flemish village in which we find our personages had made a momentary halt, delivered to the prince the secret of the count; the ensign had not quitted the prince since his return, and could perfectly inform Henri.

On arriving at Château Thierry, the prince had at first sought dissipation and noise; at this time he inhabited the grand apartments, received company morning and evening; and during the day hunted the stag in the forest; but since the news of the death of Aurilly, news that had come to the prince no one knew how,

the prince had retired to the pavilion situated in the middle of the park : this pavilion, a sort of inaccessible retreat, except to the familiars of the house of the prince, was hidden in the foliage of the trees, and scarcely appeared above the gigantic elm-tree avenues, and through the thickness of the hedges.

It was in this pavilion that for the last two days the prince had retired; those who did not know him, said it was vexation caused by the death of Aurilly, which plunged him into solitude; those who knew him, pretended that he was accomplishing in this pavilion some shameful or infernal work, which some morning would burst into light.

The prince seemed in despair when an affair or a visit called him to the château; so much so that immediately the visit was received, or the affair concluded, he returned to his solitude, simply attended by two valets de chambre, who had been with him from his birth.

'Then,' said Henri, the fêtes will not be gay, if the prince is in this humour ?'

'Assuredly,' replied the ensign, 'for every one will compassionate the grief of the prince, wounded in his pride and in his affections.'

Henri continued to question, without intending it, and took a strange interest in such questions. This death of Aurilly, whom he had known at the court, and whom he had again seen in Flanders; the species of indifference with which the prince had announced to him the loss he had suffered; the seclusion in which the prince lived, as they said, since his death; all this was connected, in his mind, without his knowing how, with the mysterious and sombre drama, on which, for some time past, had rested the events of his life.

'And,' he inquired of the ensign, 'it is not known, you said, how the news of Aurilly's death reached the prince ?'

'No.'

'But still,' he persisted, 'is there anything said about it ?'

'Oh ! undoubtedly,' said the ensign, 'true or false, you know, they always say something.'

'Well ! let us hear.'

'They say that the prince was hunting under the willows, near the river, and that he was separated from the other sportsmen, for he does everything by fits, and conducts himself in the chase as at play, as in battle,

as in grief, when suddenly, he was seen to return with his features in consternation.

'The courtiers questioned him, thinking it was nothing more than a simple hunting adventure.

'He held in his hand two rouleaux of gold.

"'Can you comprehend this, gentlemen?'" he said in a broken voice; "Aurilly is dead, Aurilly has been devoured by the wolves."

'Every one exclaimed against it.

"'No, no," said the prince, 'it is so, or the devil fetch me; the poor lute player was always a better musician than a good horseman. It appears that his horse ran away with him, and that he fell into a quagmire where he was killed. The next morning, two travellers who passed near this bog found his body half devoured by wolves, and as a proof that the affair thus passed, and that robbers had nothing to do in all this, is, here are two rouleaux of gold he had about him, and which have been faithfully brought back.'

'Now, as no one had been seen to bring these two rouleaux of gold,' continued the ensign, 'it was supposed they had been delivered to the prince by the two travellers, who, having encountered and recognised him on the banks of the river, had announced to him this news of the death of Aurilly.'

"'Tis strange,' murmured Henri.

'Much the more strange,' continued the ensign, 'that they saw, it is said again, whether true or false, the prince open the little gate of the park, by the chestnut-trees, and through this door pass two beings like spectres. The prince, then, introduced these two persons into the park, probably the two travellers. It is since this circumstance that the prince has emigrated into his pavilion, and we have only seen him by stealth.'

'And no one saw these two travellers?' said Henri.

'I,' said the ensign, 'on going to demand the pass-word for the night, for the guard of the château, encountered a man who appeared to me a stranger to the house of his royal highness, but I could not see his features, the man having turned away on seeing me, and having drawn over his eyes the hood of his surcoat.'

'The hood of his surcoat, you say?'

'Yes; the man looked like a Flemish peasant, and

reminded me, I know not why, of him who accompanied you when we went yonder.'

Henri started: this observation recalled to him the gloomy and tenacious interest which this history referred to; to him, also, who had seen Diana and her companion confided to Aurilly, the idea had occurred that the two travellers, who had announced to the prince the death of the unfortunate lute player, were known to him.

Henri regarded the ensign with attention.

'And when you fancied you recognised this man, what idea occurred to you, sir?' he inquired.

'This is what I thought,' replied the ensign; 'still I would not affirm it. The prince, no doubt, has not renounced his ideas as to Flanders; in consequence he has spies; the man in the woollen surcoat is a spy, and in his rounds has learned the accident to the musician, and brought a double supply of news.'

'That is likely,' said Henri, in a reverie, 'but what was this man doing when you saw him?'

'He was walking by the side of the hedge that borders the parterre; you can see the hedge from your windows, and reached the summer-houses.'

'Then you mean the two travellers, for you say there were two?'

'They say that two persons were seen to enter, but I only saw one, the man in the surcoat.'

'Then, in your opinion, the man in the surcoat inhabits the summer-houses?'

'Tis probable.'

'And have these summer-houses an egress?'

'On the town, yes, count.'

Henri remained for some time silent; his heart beat violently; these details, apparently indifferent for him, who seemed in all this mystery to have a double life, had an immense interest.

Night had approached during this conversation, and the two young men conversed without light in the apartment of Joyeuse.

Fatigued with the journey, perplexed by the strange events narrated to him, without strength against the emotions they had produced in him, the count was reclining on his brother's bed, and mechanically directed his eyes towards the azure of the sky, which seemed a constellation of diamonds.

The young ensign was seated on the ledge of the window, and also yielded himself to that abandonment of spirit, to that poetry of youth, to that chastened stillness of thought, produced by the balmy freshness of the evening.

A profound silence reigned over the park and the town, the doors were closed, lights were appearing by degrees, the dogs in the distant kennels bayed at the valets charged to secure the doors of the stables at night.

Suddenly the ensign rose up, made a sign of attention with his hand, leaned out of the window, and calling the count in a quick and low tone, as he lay extended on the bed :

'Come, come,' he said.

'What, then ?' demanded Henri, breaking suddenly from his dream.

'The man, the man.'

'What man ?'

'The man with the surcoat, the spy.'

'Oh !' said Henri, bounding from the bed to the window, and leaning on the shoulder of his companion.

'There,' said the ensign, 'do you see him yonder ? He is sidling along the hedge; stay, he will reappear; there, at that spot lighted by the moon; there he is, there he is.'

'Yes.'

'Is he not sinister ?'

'Sinister is the word,' replied du Bouchage, becoming sombre himself.

'Do you think he is a spy ?'

'I believe nothing, and I believe everything.'

'See, he goes from the pavilion of the prince to the summer-houses.'

'The pavilion of the prince is there, then ?' demanded du Bouchage, pointing with his finger to the point from which the stranger appeared to come.

'See that light that trembles in the midst of the foliage.'

'Well ?'

'Tis that of the dining-room.'

'Ah !' exclaimed Henri, 'there he appears again.'

'Yes, decidedly he is going to the summer-houses to rejoin his companion; do you hear ?'

'What ?'

'The noise of a key that creaks in the lock ?'

'Tis strange,' said du Bouchage, 'there is nothing in all this out of the common, and yet——'

'And yet you shudder, is it not so ?'

'Yes,' said the count, 'but what is it now ?'

The sound of a kind of clock was heard.

'Tis the signal for the supper of the prince's house; will you come and sup with us, count ?'

'No, thank you, I am in need of nothing; and if hunger attacks me, I will call.'

'Do not wait for that, sir, but come; your spirits will return in our company.'

'No, no, it is impossible.'

'Why ?'

'His royal highness has almost enjoined me to be served in my apartment; but don't let me delay you.'

'Thankyou, count; good-night! Watch our spectre well.'

'Oh! yes, I promise you, unless,' continued Henri, fearing he had said too much, 'unless sleep should lay hold of me, which appears to me more probable and more healthy than watching spies and spectres.'

'Certainly,' said the ensign; and he took leave of du Bouchage.

Scarcely was he outside the library, than Henri rushed into the garden.

'Oh!' he murmured, 'tis Remy, 'tis Remy; I should recognise him in the darkness of hell.'

And the young man, finding his knees trembling under him, placed his two humid hands on his burning forehead.

'My God!' he said, 'is it not rather an hallucination of my poor diseased brain, and is it not written, that in sleep or awake, in the day or night, I shall constantly behold these two figures, who have dug so sombre a furrow in my life ?'

'In fact,' he continued, like a man who feels the necessity of convincing himself, 'why is Remy come here, in this château, to the Duke of Anjou ? what will he do ? what relations can the Duke of Anjou have with Remy ? And how has he quitted Diana—he, he, her eternal companion ? No, 'tis not Remy.' Then, in about an instant, a deep, instinctive conviction obtaining the mastery over doubt :—

'It is, it is,' he murmured, in despair, and leaning against the wall to prevent himself from falling.

As he finished giving utterance to this ruling, invincible idea, the mistress of all the rest, the sharp creak of the lock again sounded, and although the sound was almost imperceptible, his over-exerted senses seized it.

An indescribable shudder ran through the body of the young man. He listened again. The silence was so profound all around him, that he heard his own heart beat.

Some minutes elapsed without his observing anything. Yet, though his sight failed him, his ears told him that some one approached.

He heard the gravel creak under his steps.

Suddenly the black line of the hedge appeared uneven; it seemed to him that in this sombre darkness, he could see the movement of a group still more dark.

'He is now returning,' murmured Henri; 'is he alone, is he accompanied?'

The group advanced to the spot where the moon threw its silvery light over an empty space. 'Twas at this moment that, walking in an opposite direction, the man in the surcoat crossed this space, and Henri thought he recognised Remy.

This time, Henri saw two shadows very distinctly; he could not be mistaken.

A mortal chillness fell upon his heart, and seemed to have made a marble statue of him.

The two shadows walked quickly, although with a firm step; the first was dressed in a surcoat of wool, and at this second apparition, as at the former one, the count firmly believed he could recognise Remy.

The second, completely enveloped in the large cloak of a man, escaped all analysis; and yet, under this cloak, Henri fancied he could divine what no one could have seen.

He uttered a sort of painful groan, and as soon as the two mysterious personages had disappeared behind the hedge of elm-trees, the young man rushed behind and glided from tree to tree, in the steps of those he wished to discover.

'Oh!' he murmured, still walking, 'is it that I am not deceived? My God! is it possible?'

CHAPTER LXXXIX

CERTAINTY

HENRI glided along the hedge on the dark side, observing the precaution to make no noise, either on the gravel or against the foliage.

Obliged to walk, and in walking, to be careful, he could

see nothing distinctly, still, from the figure, from the habits, from the step, he persisted in recognising Remy in the man with the woollen surcoat.

Simple conjectures, more terrifying to him than realities, rose in his mind respecting the companion of this man.

The row of elm-trees led to a large hedge of thorn, and to the line of poplars which separated from the rest of the park the pavilion of the Duke of Anjou, and enveloped it in a curtain of verdure, in the midst of which, as we have already said, it disappeared entirely in the isolated corner of the château. There were some fine pieces of water, sombre groves, intersected by sinuous paths, and trees on the summits of which the moon shed cascades of its silvery light, whilst underneath, the shade was dark, opaque, and impenetrable.

On approaching this hedge, Henri felt that his heart was failing him.

In fact, thus audaciously to transgress the orders of the prince, and yield himself to indiscretions so rash, was the action, not of an honest and loyal gentleman, but of a cowardly spy, of a jealous man, resolved upon any extreme.

But as, on opening the barrier which separated the great park from the little one, the man made a movement that discovered his face, and as this face was really that of Remy, the count had no more scruples, and resolutely pushed forward, at the risk of anything that might happen.

The door was again closed, Henri jumped over the fence and continued to follow the two strange visitors of the prince. The latter hastened.

Under a thick row of chestnut-trees, at the extremity of which was seen the pavilion with its soft lights, Henri could not so easily follow these persons, who, on turning round, would have perceived him directly.

Besides, another object of terror now assailed him.

The duke left the pavilion at the noise made on the gravel by Remy and his companion. Henri threw himself behind the largest of the trees, and waited.

He could see nothing, except that Remy saluted very low, that the companion of Remy, made a courtesy, and not a bow, and that the duke, transported, had offered his hand to the latter, as he would have done to a wife.

All three then turned towards the pavilion, disappeared

under the vestibule, the door of which was closed behind them.

'I must finish with it,' said Henri, 'and adopt a more convenient place, from whence I can see every gesture, without being seen.'

He decided for a massive statue, situated between the pavilion and the espaliers, and in the centre of which spouted a fountain, an impenetrable asylum, for it was not at night, from the freshness and humidity naturally spread around the fountain, that the prince faced the water and the groves.

Concealed behind the statue that surmounted the fountain, Henri could see what took place in the pavilion, whose principal window was immediately in front of him.

As no one could, or rather would penetrate to this, no precaution had been taken. A table was laid, served with luxury and loaded with precious wines enclosed in Venetian bottles.

Two seats alone at this table awaited two guests.

The duke stepped towards one, and quitting the arm of the companion of Remy, indicating to her the other seat, he seemed to invite her to take off her cloak, which, very convenient for a nocturnal journey, became very inconvenient when they had arrived at the end of this journey, and when this end was a supper.

The person to whom the invitation was made, threw her cloak on a chair, and the light of the flambeaux cast an unshaded light on the pale and majestically handsome countenance of a woman, whom the astonished eyes of Henri immediately recognised.

It was the lady of the mysterious house of the Rue des Augustins, the traveller in Flanders; it was that Diana, in fact, whose looks were as mortal as the thrust of a poniard.

This time she wore the dress of her sex, and was habited in a brocaded robe; diamonds sparkled on her neck, in her hair, and on her wrists.

Under these ornaments, the paleness of her features was more perceptible, and without the flame that sparkled in her eye, one might have fancied that the duke, by the employment of some magical means, had evoked the shadow of this woman rather than the woman herself.

Without the support of the statue, round which he folded his arms colder than the marble itself, Henri would have fallen backwards into the basin of the fountain,

The duke appeared drunk with joy; he covered with his eyes the enchanting creature who sat opposite to him. At times Francis reached over the table to kiss one of the hands of his dumb and pale convive, who seemed as insensible to these kisses, as if her hand had been sculptured from the alabaster of which she had the transparency and the whiteness.

From time to time, Henri started, carried his hand to his forehead, wiped away with this hand the cold sweat which moistened it, and asked himself,—

‘Is she living? is she dead?’

The duke made every effort, and displayed all his eloquence to un wrinkle this austere brow.

Remy, the only attendant, for the duke had dismissed every one, served the two persons, and from time to time, touching his mistress with his elbow, when he passed behind her, appeared to revive her by the contact, and recall her to life, or rather to her situation.

A flood of vermilion would then mount to the forehead of the young women, her eyes would flash like the lightning, she smiled as if some magician had touched an unknown spring of this intelligent automaton, and had operated on the mechanism of her eyes of lightning, on that of her crimson cheeks, on that of her smiling lips.

She would then fall back to her immobility.

The prince, however, approached her, and by his passionate discourse, commenced warming his new conquest.

Diana, who from time to time looked at the hour on the magnificent time-piece, hung over the head of the prince, on the wall opposite to her, appeared to make an effort in herself, and with a smile on her lips, took an active part in the conversation.

Henri, under the shelter of his foliage, tore himself and cursed all creation. It seemed to him monstrous and iniquitous, that this woman, so pure and so severe, abandoned herself thus vulgarly to the prince, because he was a prince—to love because it was gilded in the palace.

His horror of Remy was such, that he would have ripped him open without mercy, to see if such a monster had the blood and the heart of a man.

Diana rang. The prince, warmed by the wine and his gallant discourse, rose from the table to embrace Diana.

The blood of Henri boiled in his veins. He searched his side to find a sword—in his bosom, to find a poniard.

Diana, with a strange smile, and which certainly until then had never had its equal on any countenance—Diana stopped him on the way.

'Monseigneur,' she said, 'permit me, before rising from table, to share with you this fruit that tempts me.'

With these words, she extended her hand towards the basket of golden filagree, which contained about twenty magnificent peaches, and took one.

And detaching from her waist a small knife, the blade of which was silver, and the handle malachite, she separated the peach into two parts, and offered one to the prince, who seized it and carried it eagerly to his lips, as though he was kissing those of Diana.

This passionate action produced such an impression upon himself, that a cloud obscured his sight at the moment he bit at the fruit. Diana regarded him with her clear eye and motionless smile. Remy, leaning against a pillar of sculptured wood, also looked on with a sombre air.

The prince passed his hand across his forehead, wiped away a few drops of sweat that stood like pearls on its humid surface, and swallowed the morsel he had bitten off.

This sweat was, no doubt, the symptom of a sudden indisposition, for whilst Diana was eating the other portion of the peach, the prince dropped what remained of his on a plate, and rising with an effort, he seemed to invite his prettyguest to take some air with him in the garden.

Diana rose and without pronouncing a word took the arm offered her by the duke. Remy followed them with his eyes, especially the prince, whom the air completely revived.

Whilst walking, Diana wiped the little blade of her knife in a handkerchief embroidered with gold, and replaced it in its shagreen case.

They thus arrived quite close to the thicket in which Henri was concealed.

The prince amorously pressed against his heart the hand of the young woman.

'I feel myself better,' he said, 'and yet I know not what heaviness seizes my brain. I am too much in love; I see it, madame.'

Diana gathered some flowers from a jessamine, a branch from a clematis, and two handsome roses, which carpeted one side of the base of the statue, behind which Henri was listening, himself in terror.

'What are you doing, madame ?' said the prince.

'I have been constantly assured, monseigneur,' she said, 'that the perfume of flowers is the best remedy for giddiness. I am gathering a bouquet in the hope that given by me, this bouquet will possess the magic influence I wish for.'

But whilst uniting the flowers of the bouquet, she dropped a rose, which the prince gallantly hastened to pick up.

The movement of the prince was rapid, but not so rapid, however, as not to allow Diana time to pour on the other rose a few drops of a liquor, enclosed in a golden flask she carried at her waist. She then took the rose which the prince had picked up, and putting it in her girdle :—

'This one is for me,' she said, 'let us change.'

And, in exchange for the rose she received from the prince, she presented to him the bouquet.

The prince took it eagerly, smelled at it with delight, and passed his hand round the waist of Diana. But this voluptuous pressure completed, no doubt, the disorder in the senses of Francis, for his knees trembled, and he was forced to seat himself on a turf bench close by.

Henri did not lose sight of the two personages, and still he had an eye for Remy, who, in the pavilion, waited the conclusion of this scene, or rather devoured every detail of it.

When he saw the prince bend, he approached to the door of the pavilion. Diana, on her side, finding the prince stagger, seated herself near him on the bench.

The giddiness of Francis lasted this time longer than the first; the head of the prince rested on his bosom. He seemed to have lost the thread of his ideas, and almost the consciousness of his existence, and yet the convulsive movements of his fingers on the hand of Diana indicated that from instinct he pursued the chimera of love.

At length he slowly raised his head, his lips being on a level with the face of Diana. He made an effort to touch those of his beautiful companion; but, as though she had not noticed the movement, the young woman rose.

'You are suffering, monseigneur ?' she said, 'you had better return.'

'Oh ! yes, let us return !' exclaimed the prince in a transport of joy; 'yes, come, thank you.'

And he rose, though still unsteady; and now, instead of Diana leaning on his arm, it was the prince who leaned on her arm; and, thanks to this support, walking more at his ease, he seemed to forget fever and giddiness;

drawing himself up all at once, he pressed his lips, almost by surprise, on the neck of the young woman.

The latter shuddered as if, instead of the impression of a kiss, she had received the sting of a heated iron.

'Remy, a candle !' she cried, 'a candle !'

Remy immediately returned to the dining-room, and from the wax lights lit a flambeau, which he took from a small table, and hastily approaching the entrance of the pavilion, the flambeau in his hand :—

'Here it is, madame,' he said.

'Where will your highness go ?' demanded Diana, on seizing the flambeau, and turning away her head.

'Oh ! to my room ! to my room ! and you will guide me, will you not, madame ?' replied the prince.

'Willingly, monsieur,' replied Diana. She rose up, the flambeau in her hand, preceding the prince.

Remy opened, at the extremity of the pavilion, a window, through which the air rushed in such a manner that the candle, carried by Diana, launched, as if enraged, all its flame and smoke on the face of Francis, placed exactly in the current of air.

The two lovers, as Henri judged them, arrived in this manner at the chamber of the duke, and disappeared behind the drapery of fleur-de-lis that served as a door-screen.

Henri had seen all that had passed with increasing fury, and yet this fury was such that it approached annihilation.

It seemed as though there only remained to him strength enough to curse the fate that had imposed upon him so cruel a trial.

He had left his hiding-place, and, dispirited, his arms hanging down, prepared to regain, half dead, his apartment in the château, when suddenly the screen behind which he had seen Diana and the prince disappear, was raised, and the young woman, rushing to the dining-room, drew Remy, who, standing up and motionless, seemed only to await her return.

'Come !' she said to him, 'come, all is finished ;' and they both rushed, like persons drunk, mad, or furious, into the garden.

But, at sight of them, Henri recovered all his strength ; he hastened to meet them, and they encountered him suddenly in the middle of the alley, upright, his arms crossed, and more terrible in his silence than he had ever been in his threats. Henri, in fact, had arrived at such

a degree of exasperation that he would have killed any one rash enough to maintain that men were not monsters sent by hell to defile the world. He seized Diana by the arm and stopped her short, despite the cry of terror she uttered, despite the knife that Remy presented at his breast, and which even grazed the flesh.

'Oh! you do not recognise me, no doubt,' he said, with a terrible grinding of his teeth; 'I am that young man who loved you, and to whom you would not give your love, because for you there was no future, but simply a past. Ah! pretty hypocrite. And you, lying coward, I know you at length; I know you and I curse you. To one I say I despise you; to the other, you cause me horror.'

'Passage!' cried Remy, in a choking voice, 'passage! young madman, or else——'

'Be it so,' replied Henri, 'finish your work, and kill my miserable body, since you have killed my soul.'

'Silence!' murmured Remy, furious, burying his blade still deeper in the bosom of the young man.

But Diana violently repulsed the arm of Remy, and seizing that of du Bouchage, she drew him opposite to her.

She had a livid pallor; her handsome hair waved stiffly over her shoulders; the contact of her hand on the wrist of Henri, produced in the latter a chill like that of a corpse.

'Sir,' she said, 'judge not rashly of the things of God. I am Diana of Meridor, the mistress of M. du Bussy, whom the Duke of Anjou allowed to be miserably killed, when he could have saved him. A week since, Remy poniarded Aurilly, the accomplice of the prince; and as to the prince, I have just poisoned him with a fruit, a flambeau, and a bouquet. Place! sir, place for Diana of Meridor, who, after this step, will go to the convent of the Hospitalières.' She spoke, and quitting the arm of Henri, she took that of Remy, who waited for her.

Henri fell on his knees, then backwards, following with his eyes the frightful group of assassins, who disappeared in the depth of the thicket, like an infernal vision.

It was not until an hour afterwards that the young man, overcome with fatigue, crushed with terror, and his head on fire, succeeded in finding strength enough to drag himself to his apartment, after a dozen attempts to escalate his window. He took a few steps in his room, and threw himself, tottering, on his bed.

Every one slept in the chateau.

CHAPTER XC

FATALITY

THE next morning, towards nine o'clock, a gay sunshine powdered with gold the gravel walks of Chateau Thierry.

Nothing was yet moving in the pavilion, where the duke reposed, for he had, the evening before, forbidden his two old attendants to awake him. They were to wait till he called them.

About half-past nine, two couriers, riding at speed, entered the town, and announced the near approach of His Majesty. The sheriffs, the governor, and the garrison made a rank like a hedge, to keep a passage for the *cortège*.

At ten o'clock, the King appeared at the base of the hill. He had mounted on horseback at the last relay. It was an opportunity he always seized, and principally upon his entrance into a town, being a good horseman.

The queen-mother followed him in a litter; fifty gentlemen, richly dressed and well mounted, came in their suite.

A company of guards, commanded by Crillon himself, a hundred and twenty Swiss, as many Scotch, commanded by Larchant, and nearly the whole of the King's household, mules, coffers, and valets, formed an army, the ranks of which followed the picturesque sinuosities of the road, which ascends from the river to the summit of the hill.

At length the *cortège* entered the town, to the sound of bells, cannons, and music of every kind.

The acclamations of the inhabitants were loud, the King was so rare in those times, that, seen close, he appeared to have still retained a ray of divinity.

The King, on marching through the crowd, sought his brother in vain. He only found Henri du Bouchage at the gate of the chateau.

Once in the interior, Henri the Third inquired after the health of the Duke of Anjou, of the officer who had taken upon himself to receive His Majesty.

'Sire,' replied this officer, 'his highness has inhabited, for some days, the pavilion of the park, and we have not yet seen him this morning. It is probable, however, that, finding himself well yesterday, he may not be well to-day.'

'Tis a very retired spot, as it appears,' said Henry,

discontented, 'this pavilion of the park, for the cannon not to be heard.'

'Sire,' ventured to say one of the old servitors of the duke, 'his highness did not, perhaps, so soon expect your Majesty.'

'Old fool,' grumbled Henry, 'think you, then, that a King comes like this amongst persons without apprising them? M. the Duke of Anjou knew of my coming since yesterday.'

Then, fearing to sadden every one by a care-worn appearance, Henry, who wished to appear gentle and kind at the expense of Francis, exclaimed,—

'Since he does not come to meet us, let us go to meet him.'

'Show us the way,' said Catherine, from the bottom of her litter.

The whole escort took the road to the old park.

At the moment the first guards reached the line of elm trees, a heart-rending and lugubrious cry pierced the air.

'What is that?' said the King, turning towards his mother.

'My God!' murmured Catherine, endeavouring to read every countenance, 'tis a cry of distress or despair.'

'My prince! my poor duke!' exclaimed the other old attendant of Francis, appearing at a window with signs of the most violent grief.

All ran to the pavilion, the King drawn by the others.

He arrived at the moment they were raising the body of the Duke of Anjou, whom his valet de chambre, entering without order, to announce the arrival of the King, had discovered lying on the carpet of his bedroom.

The prince was cold, stiff, and gave no other sign of existence than a strange movement of the pupils and a frightful contraction of the lips.

The King stopped at the threshold of the door, and every one behind him.

'This is a villainous prognostic!' he murmured.

'Retire, my son,' said Catherine to him, 'I entreat you.'

'Poor Francis!' said Henry, happy at being dismissed, and thus avoiding the spectacle of his agony.

The crowd fell away in the track of the King.

'Strange! strange!' murmured Catherine, kneeling near the prince, or rather the corpse, without other company than that of the two servitors; and whilst the town

was ransacked to seek the physician of the prince, and a courier rode to Paris to hasten the arrival of the King's physicians, left at Meaux with the Queen, she examined, with less science, no doubt, but not with less perspicacity than Miron himself would have done, the diagnostics of this strange malady to which her son had fallen a prey.

The Florentine had experience; so, above everything, she questioned coolly, and without embarrassing them, the two servitors, who tore their hair and disfigured their faces in their despair.

Both replied, that the prince had returned the previous evening at dark, after having been disturbed very unexpectedly by M. Henri du Bouchage, who came on the track of the King.

They then added, that, at the close of this audience, given in the grand château, the prince had commanded a delicate supper, and ordered that no one should present himself at the pavilion until called; and, lastly, positively enjoined, that he should not be awakened in the morning, or that they should not enter his apartment without a distinct summons.

'He expected some mistress, no doubt?' demanded the queen-mother.

'We think so, madame,' humbly replied the valets, 'but discretion prevented us assuring ourselves of the fact.'

'On clearing away, however, you must have seen whether my son supped alone?'

'We have not yet cleared away, madame, since it was the order of monseigneur that no one should enter the pavilion.'

'Well,' said Catherine, 'no one has penetrated here then?'

'No one, madame.'

'Retire.'

And Catherine remained completely alone.

Leaving the prince on the bed, as they had deposited him, she then commenced a minute investigation of every symptom, of every trace that rose to her mind as a result of her suspicions or of her fears.

She saw the features of Francis discoloured by a dark tint, his eyes bloody, and with a blue circle, his lips streaked with a furrow, similar to that caused by lighted sulphur on living flesh. She observed the same sign on the nostrils and sides of the nose.

'Let us see,' she said, looking around the prince; and

the first thing she saw was the candlestick, in which was consumed the whole candle lighted the previous evening by Remy.

'This candle has burned a long while,' she said, 'therefore Francis has been a long time in this room. Ah! here is a bouquet on the carpet.' Catherine hastily seized it, and remarking that all the flowers were still fresh, with the exception of a rose, that was blackened and withered:

'What is this?' she murmured, 'what has been poured on the leaves of this flower! I know, it seems to me, a liquor that thus withers roses.'

She threw the bouquet away with a shudder.

'This will explain to me the decomposition of the flesh of the nostrils and on the face; but the lips?'

Catherine ran to the dining-room; the valets had spoken the truth, nothing indicated that a cover had been touched since the conclusion of the repast.

On the edge of the table a moiety of the peach, in which was imprinted a half circle of teeth, more particularly drew the attention of Catherine.

This fruit, so vermilion at the heart, had blackened like the rose, and was enamelled within with brown and violet marbling. The corrosive action was more particularly noticed in the cut, where the knife had passed.

'Now then for the lips,' she said; 'but Francis has only bitten one mouthful from the fruit. He did not long retain this bouquet in his hand, the flowers of which are still fresh, the evil is not without a remedy, the poison cannot have penetrated deeply.'

'But then, if it has only acted superficially, why is this paralysis so complete, and this work of decomposition so far advanced? I cannot have seen all.' In saying these words, Catherine carried her eyes round her, and saw, suspended from its rosewood stick by its silver chain, the red and blue paroquet which Francis was greatly attached to.

The bird was dead, stiff, and its wings extended and bristling.

Catherine again fixed her anxious attention on the candle, which she had already examined once, to assure herself, from its complete combustion, that the prince had retired early.

'The smoke!' said Catherine to herself, 'the smoke, the wick of the candle was poisoned, my son is dead.'

She instantly called. The chamber was filled with officers and attendants.

'Miron ! Miron !' said some.

'A priest !' said the other.

But Catherine, during this time, approached to the lips of Francis one of the smelling bottles she always carried at her side, and examined the features of her son to judge of the effect of the antidote. The duke once more opened his eyes and mouth, but in his eyes was no longer the look of intelligence, the voice no longer ascended to the throat.

Catherine, gloomy and silent, retired from the chamber, making a sign to the two servitors to follow her, before they had yet communicated with any one. She then conducted them to another pavilion, where she seated herself, keeping both under her eye.

'M. the Duke of Anjou,' she said, 'has been poisoned at his supper; it is you who served this supper.'

At these words, the pallor of death spread over the features of the two men.

'Let them apply the torture to us,' they said; 'let them kill us, but let us not be accused.'

'You are simpletons; do you suppose that if I had suspected you, the thing would not be already done ? You have not, I am well aware, assassinated your master, but others have killed him, and I must know the murderers. Who entered the pavilion ?'

'An old man, miserably dressed, whom monseigneur received two days since.'

'But the woman ?'

'We have not seen one. Of what woman could your Majesty speak ?'

'A woman has been here who has made a bouquet.'

The two servants regarded each other with such simplicity, that Catherine recognised their innocence by a single glance.

'Let them send to me,' she then said, 'the governor of the town, and the governor of the château.'

The two servants rushed towards the door.

'A moment !' said Catherine, nailing them to the threshold by this single word. 'You and I alone know what I have said to you; I shall not mention it myself; if any one learns it, it will be by one of you; on that day you shall both die. Go.'

Catherine questioned, less openly, the two governors.

She told them that the duke had received some bad news of a certain person, which had greatly affected him—that this was the cause of his illness—that, upon questioning afresh the persons, the duke would, no doubt, recover from his alarm. The governors had the town, the park, and the environs searched. No one could say what had become of Remy and Diana. Henri alone knew the secret, and there was no danger of his revealing it.

The whole day, the frightful news—commented on, exaggerated, mutilated—spread through Château Thierry and the province. Each explained, according to his character and his feeling, the accident fallen upon the duke. But none, excepting Catherine and du Bouchage, avowed to himself that the duke was a dead man.

This unhappy prince recovered neither voice nor sentiment, or, to speak clearer, he no longer gave any sign of consciousness. The King, struck with gloomy impressions, which he feared above everything, would willingly have returned to Paris; but the Queen-Mother opposed this departure, and the court was compelled to remain at the château.

The physicians arrived in crowds. Miron alone divined the cause of the illness, and felt its gravity; but he was too good a courtier not to withhold the truth, especially when he had consulted the eye of Catherine.

He was interrogated on all sides, and he replied that certainly the Duke of Anjou had experienced some heavy grief and received a violent shock. He did not compromise himself, therefore, which is very difficult in such cases.

When Henry the Third requested him to reply affirmatively or negatively to this question:—

‘Will the duke live?’

‘In three days I will inform your Majesty,’ replied the physician.

‘And to me what will you say?’ said Catherine in a low voice.

‘To you, madame, it is different; I shall reply without hesitation.’

‘What?’

‘Let your Majesty question me.’

‘On what day will my son die, Miron?’

‘To-morrow evening, madame.’

‘So soon!’

‘Ah! madame,’ murmured the physician, ‘the dose was much too strong.’

Catherine placed a finger on her lips, regarded the dying man, and repeated, in a low tone, her sinister word, 'Fatality !'

CHAPTER XCI

THE HOSPITALIÈRES

THE count had passed a terrible night, in a state approaching delirium and death.

Faithful to his duties, however, as soon as he heard the arrival of the King announced, he rose, and received him at the gate, as we have said; but, after having presented his homage to His Majesty, saluted the Queen-Mother, and pressed the hand of the admiral, he shut himself up in his chamber, not to die, but to put decidedly in execution his project, which nothing should now oppose.

Thus, towards eleven o'clock in the morning—that is, when, in consequence of this terrible news, that had spread abroad, 'The Duke of Anjou is struck for death !' every one had disappeared, leaving the King completely stupefied at this unexpected event—Henri knocked at the door of his brother, who, having passed a part of the night on the high road, had retired to his chamber.

'Ah ! 'tis you,' said Joyeuse, half asleep; 'what is it ?'

'I am come to say adieu to you, my brother,' replied Henri.

'How, adieu ?—you are going ?'

'I depart, my brother, and nothing retains me here, I presume.'

'How, nothing ?'

'Undoubtedly; these fêtes, in which you wished me to assist, not taking place, I am released from my promise.'

'You are wrong, Henri,' replied the grand admiral; 'I do not permit you to depart to-day any more than I would have permitted you yesterday.'

'Be it so, my brother; but, in that case, for the first time in my life, I shall have the grief of disobeying your orders, and of failing in respect to you; for, from this moment, I declare to you, Anne, nothing shall longer prevent my entering into religion.'

'But this dispensation, coming from Rome ?'

'I shall await it in a convent.'

'Really, you are decidedly mad !' exclaimed Joyeuse, rising, with stupefaction pictured on his features.

'On the contrary, my dear and honoured brother, I am the wisest of all, for I alone know what I am about.'

'Henri, you have promised us a month.'

'Impossible, my brother.'

'But one week?'

'Not an hour.'

'But you are suffering dreadfully, dear child.'

'On the contrary, I no longer suffer; for which reason I see that the evil is without remedy.'

'But still, my friend, this woman is not a statue of bronze; she may be softened; I will bend her.'

'You will not do an impossibility, Anne; besides, were she at present to allow herself to be softened, 'tis I who would not consent to love her.'

'Come, here is another start.'

'Tis thus, my brother.'

'How, if she would have you, you would not have her? —Why, 'tis downright madness, by God!'

'Oh, no! certainly!' exclaimed Henri, with a movement of horror; 'between this woman and myself nothing more can exist.'

'What does it mean?' demanded Joyeuse, surprised; 'and who is this woman, then? Come, speak, Henri, you know well we have never had secrets for each other.'

Henri feared he had said too much, and had, by allowing himself the sentiment he had manifested, opened a door by which the eye of his brother might penetrate to the terrible secret confined in his heart; he therefore fell into a contrary excess, and, as it happens in such cases, and to recall the imprudent word that had escaped him, he pronounced one still more imprudent:—

'My brother,' he said, 'press me no further, this woman will not belong to me, since she now belongs to God.'

'Madness! fiction! this woman a nun! she has lied to you.'

'No, my brother, this woman has not lied to me; this woman is an Hospitalière. Let us speak no more of her, and let us respect every one who throws herself into the arms of the Saviour.'

Anne had sufficient power over himself not to exhibit to Henri the joy which this revelation caused him. He continued.

'This is new, for you had never mentioned it to me.'

'It is new, in fact, for she has recently taken the veil;

but I am certain of it, like mine, her resolution is irrevocable. Therefore, do not retain me, my brother; embrace me as you love me; let me thank you for all your kindness, for all your patience, for your infinite love for a poor madman, and farewell!

Joyeuse regarded the countenance of his brother; he regarded him like a man deeply affected, and who relies upon this feeling to decide persuasion in another.

But Henri remained unshaken by this emotion, and replied by his sad and eternal smile.

Joyeuse embraced his brother, and allowed him to depart.

'Go,' said he to himself; 'all is not yet finished, and, hasty as you are, I shall soon overtake you.'

He went to the King, who was breakfasting in bed, with Chicot by his side.

'Good morning! good morning!' said Henri to Joyeuse, 'I am very glad to see you, Anne; I feared you would remain in bed all day, idler. How is my brother?'

'Alas! sire, I cannot say; I am come to speak to you of mine.'

'Which of them?'

'Of Henri.'

'Is he still resolved to become a monk?'

'More than ever.'

'He takes the habit?'

'Yes, sire.'

'He is right, my son.'

'How, sire?'

'Yes, we go quickly to heaven by this road.'

'Oh!' said Chicot to the King, 'we go still quicker by the road your brother takes.'

'Sire, would your Majesty permit me a question?'

'Twenty, Joyeuse, twenty. I am terribly out of sorts at Château Thierry, and your questions will amuse me a little.'

'Sire, you know all the religions of the kingdom?'

'Like heralry, my son.'

'What are the Hospitalières, if you please?'

'Tis a complete little community—very distinguished, very rigid, very severe, composed of twenty ladies, canonesses of Saint Joseph.'

'Do they take the veil there?'

'Yes, by favour, and on the presentation of the Queen.'

'Is it an indiscretion to inquire where this community is situate, sire?'

'No, it is situated in the Rue de Chevet Saint Landry, in the city, behind the convent of Notre Dame.'

'At Paris ?'

'At Paris.'

'Thank you, sire.'

'But why the devil do you ask me this ? Has your brother changed his mind, and, instead of making himself a friar, has determined to become an Hospitalière ?'

'No, sire, I shall not find him such a fool, after what your Majesty has told me; but I suspect his head had been turned by some one in this community; consequently, I wish to discover this some one, and speak to her.'

'By the mordieu !' said the King, in a foppish manner, 'I knew there, about seven years ago, a superior who was very handsome.'

'Well, sire, 'tis perhaps still the same.'

'I do not know; since that time, I also, Joyeuse, have entered into religion, or nearly so.'

'Sire,' said Joyeuse, 'give me, at all hazards, I entreat you, a letter for this superior, and leave of absence for two days.'

'You quit me ?' exclaimed the King, 'you leave me quite alone here ?'

'Ungrateful !' said Chicot, shrugging his shoulders, 'am I not here ?'

'My letter, sire, if you please,' said Joyeuse.

The King sighed, and yet he wrote.

'But you have only to go to Paris,' said Henry, handing the letter to Joyeuse.

'Pardon, sire; I must escort, or at least, watch over my brother.'

'Very right; go then, and return quickly.'

Joyeuse did not wait for the permission to be repeated; he quietly commanded his horses, and assuring himself that Henri had already departed, he started at a gallop for his destination. Without unbooting, the young man was conducted directly to the Rue de Chevet Saint Landry. This street adjoined the Rue d'Enfer, and was parallel with the Rue des Marmousets. A black and venerable house, behind whose walls might be distinguished the tops of some tall trees, a few grated windows, and a small door with a wicket, such was the outward appearance of the convent of the Hospitalières. On the key-stone of the vaulted arch, an artisan had engraved these Latin words with a chisel :—

Matronæ Hospites.

Time had half rusted the inscription and the stone.

Joyeuse dismounted at the wicket, and sent his horses into the Rue des Marmousets, fearing that their presence in the street would make too great a disturbance; and then, knocking at the gate of the tower,—

‘Will you have the goodness to apprise madame the superior,’ he said, ‘that M. the Duke de Joyeuse, grand-admiral of France, desires to speak with her on the part of the King ?’

The features of the religieuse who had appeared behind the gate, blushed under her nun’s cap, and the tower was shut.

Five minutes afterwards, a door opened, and Joyeuse entered the parlour. A tall and handsome woman made a deep reverence to Joyeuse, which the admiral returned, both as a religious and worldly man.

‘Madame,’ he said, ‘the King knows that you are about to admit, or that you have admitted, amongst the number of your pensionnaires, a person to whom I must speak; will you be kind enough to put me in relation with this person?’

‘Sir, the name of this person, if you please ?’

‘I am ignorant of it, madame.’

‘Then how can I accede to your request ?’

‘Nothing more easy. Who have you received within the last month ?’

‘You indicate too positively or too slightly this person,’ said the superior, ‘and I cannot comply with your demand.’

‘Why ?’

‘Because for the last month I have received no one, until this morning.’

‘This morning ?’

‘Yes, Monsieur the Duke; and you conceive that your arrival, two hours after hers, too much resembles a pursuit, to allow me to grant you the permission to speak to her.’

‘Madame, I entreat you.’

‘Impossible, sir.’

‘Only show me this lady.’

‘Impossible, I tell you. Besides, your name has sufficed to open to you the door of my house; but to speak to any one here, except myself, I must have a written order from the King.’

‘Here is this order, madame,’ replied Joyeuse, exhibiting the letter Henry had signed for him.

The superior read it, and inclined.

'Let the will of His Majesty be done,' she said, 'even when it opposes the will of God.'

And she went towards the court of the convent.

'Now, madame,' said Joyeuse, stopping her with politeness, 'you see that I have the right; but I fear its abuse and error: perhaps this lady is not the one I seek; will you be good enough to say how she arrived, why she arrived, and by whom she was accompanied?'

'All this is useless,' Monsieur the Duke,' replied the superior; 'you are not in error, and this lady, who arrived this morning only, after being expected this fortnight—this lady, who has been recommended to me by a person who has every authority over me, is really the person to whom M. the Duke de Joyeuse wishes to speak.'

With these words the superior made another reverence to the duke, and disappeared. Ten minutes afterwards, she returned, accompanied by an *Hospitalière*, whose veil was lowered entirely over her face. It was Diana, who had already assumed the habit of the order. The duke thanked the superior, offered a stool to the unknown lady, seated himself, and the superior left, closing with her own hand the door of the lonely and sombre parlour.

'Madame,' said Joyeuse, 'you are the lady of the Rue des Augustins, that mysterious woman whom my brother, M. the Count du Bouchage, loves fatally and madly.'

The *Hospitalière* inclined her head as a reply, but did not speak. This affectation appeared to Joyeuse like an incivility; he was already very ill-disposed towards his companion. He continued:—

'You have not supposed, madame, that it is sufficient to be handsome, or to appear handsome, not to have a heart hidden under this beauty, to excite a miserable passion in the mind of a young man of my name, and to say, one day, to this man, "So much the worse for you, if you have a heart; I have none, and will not have one!"'

'This was not my reply, sir, and you are misinformed,' said the *Hospitalière*, in a voice so noble and so touching, that the anger of Joyeuse was for a moment softened.

'Words have nothing to do with the sense; you have repulsed my brother, and you have reduced him to despair.'

'Truly, sir, for I have always endeavoured to keep M. du Bouchage at a distance from me.'

'That is called the intrigue of coquetry, madame, and the result makes the fault.'

'No one has the right to accuse me, sir; I am guilty of nothing; you are getting irritated towards me, I shall reply no further.'

'Oh! oh!' said Joyeuse, warming by degrees, 'you have ruined my brother, and you think to justify yourself with this provoking majesty. No, no, the step I am taking must enlighten you as to my intentions. I am serious, I swear to you, and you see, from the trembling of my hands and of my lips, that you will require good arguments to appease me.'

The Hospitalière rose.

'If you are come to insult a woman,' she said, with the same *sang-froid*, 'insult me, sir; if you are come to make me change my resolution, you lose your time. Retire, sir.'

'Ah! you are not a human creature,' exclaimed Joyeuse, exasperated, 'you are a demon.'

'I have said I will reply no further; at present that is not enough, I retire.'

And the Hospitalière made a step towards the door.

Joyeuse interrupted her.

'Ah! a moment, I have sought you too long to allow you thus to fly; and, since I have, at length, contrived to meet you, since, at length, your insensibility has confirmed me in the idea that first occurred to me, that you are an infernal creature, sent by the enemy of mankind to ruin my brother, I will see this face on which Destruction has written its blackest threats; I will see the fire of that fatal look which misleads so many spirits. To us two, Satan!'

And Joyeuse, whilst making the sign of the cross, with one hand, by way of exorcism, with the other tore away the veil that covered the face of the Hospitalière; but the latter, silent, impassible, without anger, without a reproach, fixing her pure and chastened regard upon him who had so cruelly outraged her:—'Oh! Monsieur le Duke,' she said, 'what you have now done is unworthy of a gentleman.'

Joyeuse was struck to the heart; so much gentleness softened his fury, so much beauty overthrew his reason.

'Certainly,' he murmured, after a long silence, 'you are handsome, and Henri must have loved you; but God has only given you that beauty to shed it like a perfume over an existence attached to your own.'

'Sir, have you not spoken to your brother? or, if you have spoken to him, he has not thought it consistent to make you his confidant; without this he would have

recounted to you that I have done as you say. I have loved, I shall love no more; I have lived, I must die.'

Joyeuse gazed steadily at Diana, whose wonderful looks had penetrated to the bottom of his soul, like the volcanic sheets of fire that melt the statues of bronze, merely by passing near them.

This ray had consumed all the dross in the heart of the admiral, the pure gold alone remained there, and his heart burst like the crucible under the fusion of the metal.

'Oh yes!' he said again, in a gentler voice, and continuing to fix on her a look in which the fever of rage abated by degrees; 'oh yes! Henri must have loved you. Oh! madame, for pity's sake, on my knees I entreat you, madame, love my brother.'

Diana remained silent and passionless.

'Do not reduce a family to agony; do not ruin the future of our race; do not make one die of despair, the others of regret.'

Diana did not reply, and continued to regard sorrowfully the supplicant before her.

'Oh!' exclaimed Joyeuse, at length, pressing against his heart with a nervous hand, 'oh! take pity on my brother, take pity on myself! I burn, that look has scorched me. Adieu! madame, adieu!'

He rose up like an idiot, tore the bolts from the door of the parlour, and fled dismayed to his attendants, who awaited him at the corner of the Rue d'Enfer.

CHAPTER XCII

HIS HIGHNESS MONSEIGNEUR THE DUKE DE GUISE

ON Sunday, the 10th June, about eleven o'clock, the whole court was assembled in the chamber next the cabinet in which, since his encounter with Diana of Meridor, the Duke of Anjou had been dying slowly and surely.

Neither the skill of the physicians, nor the despair of his mother, nor the prayers ordered by the King, had arrested the fatal event. Miron, on the morning of this 10th June, declared to the King, that the malady was without remedy, and that Francis d'Anjou would not live through the day.

The King affected to manifest a great grief, and turning towards those present:—'This will indeed raise the hopes of our enemies,' he said. To which the Queen-Mother replied:

'Our destiny is in the hands of God, my son.'

To which Chicot, who kept himself humble and contrite near Henry the Third, added quietly :—

‘Let us assist God, when in our power, sire.’

Notwithstanding, the patient, towards half-past eleven, failed in his sight; his mouth, till then open, now closed; the flow of blood, which for some days had alarmed all present, as on a former occasion did the sweat of Charles the Ninth, suddenly stopped, and death seized upon his extremities.

Henry was seated near the pillow of his brother. Catherine, at his side, held the icy hand of the dying man. The Bishop of Château Thierry and the Cardinal de Joyeuse said the prayers for the dying, which were repeated by all present, kneeling and their hands joined. Towards mid-day, the sufferer opened his eyes; the sun glided from beneath a cloud, and wrapped the bed in an aureole of gold.

Francis, who until now had been unable to move even a finger, and whose consciousness had been veiled like the sun that had just reappeared—Francis, we say, raised a hand towards heaven, with the gesture of a man terrified.

He looked round him, heard the prayers, understood his danger and his weakness, comprehended his position, perhaps because he already saw into that world, obscure and gloomy, to which certain souls, after they have quitted the earth, take their flight. He then uttered a piercing cry, and struck his forehead with a force that made the whole assembly shudder. Then knitting his brow, as if reading in his mind one of the mysteries of his life,—

‘Bussy !’ he murmured, ‘Diana !’

This last word none heard but Catherine, with such a weak voice had the dying man articulated it. With the last syllable of this name, Francis d’Anjou rendered his last sigh.

At this very moment, by a strange coincidence, the sun that gilded the escutcheon of France and the golden fleur-de-lis, so brilliant but an instant before, became as sombre as the azure they had starred, lately, of a constellation almost as resplendent as that which the eye of the dreamer seeks in the vault of heaven.

Catherine dropped the hand of her son.

Henry the Third started, and leaned tremblingly on the shoulder of Chicot, who also shuddered, but caused by the respect that every Christian owes to death. Miron approached the cover of a golden chalice to the lips of Francis, and, after a few seconds, having examined him :—‘Monseigneur is dead,’ he said.

Upon which, a long groan rose from the antechambers, as an accompaniment to the psalm murmured by the cardinal:—*'Cedant iniquitates meæ ad vocem deprecationes meæ.'*

'Dead I' repeated the King, signing himself, from the bottom of his arm-chair; 'my brother I my brother I'

'The sole heir to the throne of France I' murmured Catherine, who, abandoning the bedside of the dead, had already returned near the only son who remained to her.

'Ah I' said Henry, 'this throne of France is very large for a king without posterity; the crown is very large for a single head. No children I no heirs I who then will succeed me?' As he finished these words, a great noise resounded through the halls and on the staircase.

Nambu rushed towards the chamber of death, and announced:—'His Highness Monseigneur the Duke de Guise I'

Struck at this reply to the question he had addressed, the King became pale, rose up, and regarded his mother.

Catherine was still paler than her son. At the announcement of this terrible misfortune, which chance foretold to her race, she seized the hand of the King, and pressed it, as much as to say:—'Here is the danger—fear nothing, I am near you.' The son and the mother had understood each other in the same terror and the same menace.

The duke entered, followed by his captains. He carried his head high, though his eyes searched for the King or the death-bed of his brother, with a certain embarrassment.

Henry, standing up, with that supreme majesty, which he alone, perhaps, could assume at certain moments, from his nature, so strangely poetic, arrested the duke in his walk by a kingly gesture, which showed him the royal corpse on the bed, disordered by his agony.

The duke bent down, and dropped slowly on his knees.

Around him every one bent the head and followed his example. Henry the Third alone remained standing, with his mother, and his eye for a last time sparkled with pride.

Chicot noticed the brilliancy of this regard, and murmured gently that other line of the Psalms:—

*'Dejiciet potentes de sede et exaltabit humiles I'*¹

¹ He will cast down the proud from their throne, but will raise up him who humbles himself.

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Dumas, Alexandre
The forty-five guardsmen



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